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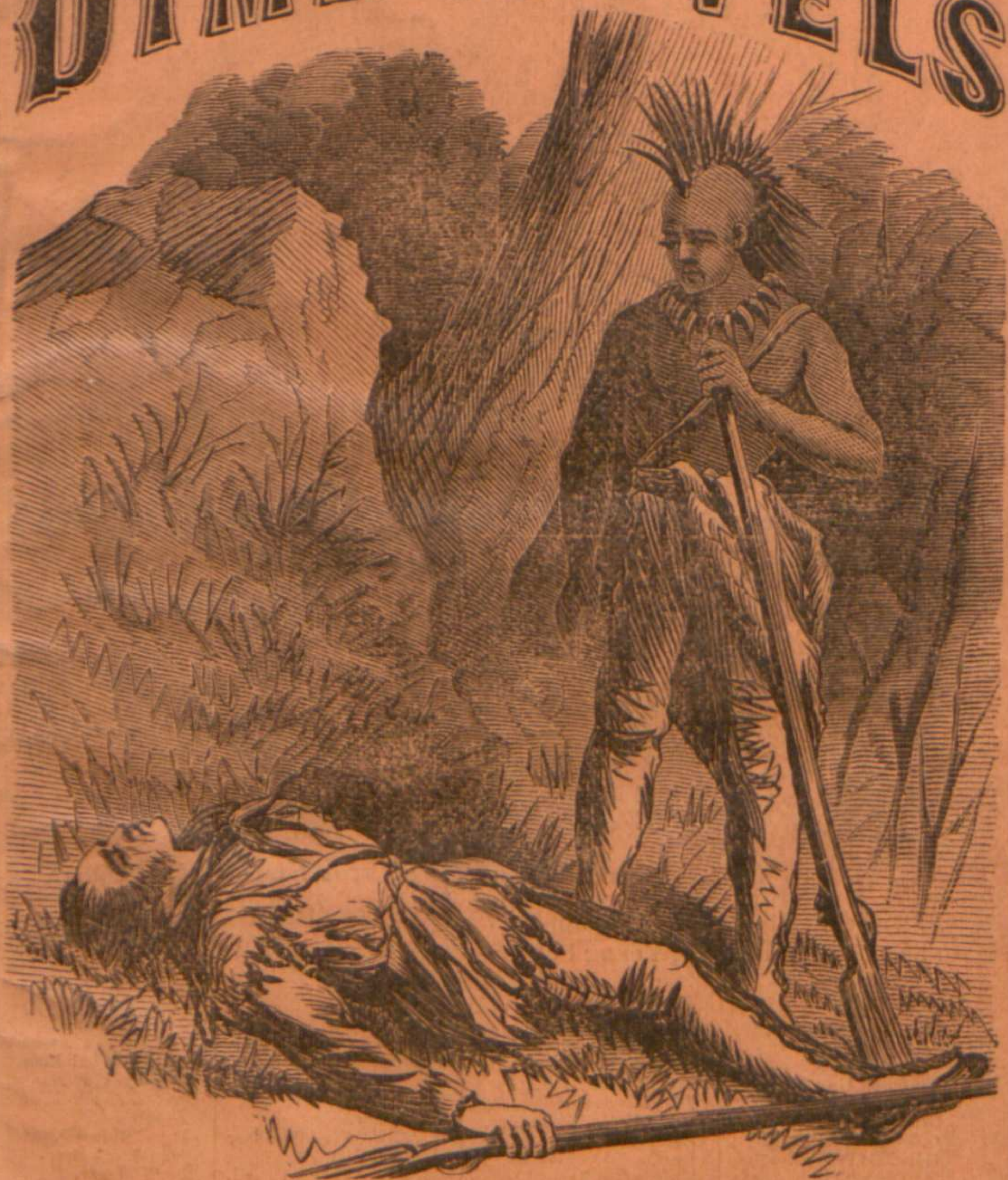
No.

BEADLE'S

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218.

DIME NOVELS



THE INDIAN SPY.

BEADLE AND COMPANY, 98 WILLIAM STREET NEW YORK.

Am. News Co., 119 & 121 Nassau st., N. Y.

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THE INDIAN SPY;



NEW YORK.

READLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS.

33 WALL STREET.



THE INDIAN SPY;

OR,

THE UNKNOWN FOE.

A ROMANCE OF EARLY KENTUCKY.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.,

AUTHOR "MASKED GUIDE," "REDLAW, THE HALF-BREED," ETC

NEW YORK:

READLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

98 WILLIAM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1870, by
BEADLE AND COMPANY,
In the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

(No. 218.)

BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS
112 WILLIAM STREET
NEW YORK

THE INDIAN SPY.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEETING AT THE "CROSS OAK."

"WELL, bless our lucky stars, I believe I'm right, after all!" exclaimed a man, as he sunk heavily down at the foot of a giant tree, giving vent to a long-drawn breath of relief, as he removed his hat and wiped away the great drops of perspiration from his brow, that bore evidence of long-continued exertion, or anxiety of mind.

Then, as he glanced keenly and curiously around him, it could be seen that he was a young man, evidently not far beyond five-and-twenty. A broad white brow, surmounted with short, curling, luxuriant hair of almost raven blackness—the color of his eyes and short, heavy mustache. His face was clear, but ruddy from exposure, as were his neck and hands.

His present garb was a plain, neat suit of gray woolen cloth, cut after a somewhat subdued pattern of the usual frontier ranger's costume; and the weapons he carried were upon the same style, serviceable, but elegant. His regular features, with their frank, open expression, together with his graceful, athletic form, would cause him to be noted, even in a crowd, for a second glance.

"Let me see," he added, drawing a small packet of papers from an inner pocket, and giving another penetrating glance around him before opening them. "Um—m! One hour after noon, at the noted landmark, the 'Cross Oak.' An hour, nearly, to spare," he added, glancing at a watch, and then resuming his studies.

"The signals or pass-word—'two slips of paper fastened one above the other, to the north side of the tree; the upper one to bear a black cross, the other, a circle inclosing the figure three.' This *must* be the place; surely there can not be two like this?" and he glanced toward a tree that stood at a little distance before him.

This was standing in a little glade, and upon the summit of a little knoll. In its day the tree must have been the pride of the forest, and in its decay, was yet majestic. Of huge girth at the base, it rose upward as straight as an arrow, without knot or limb, for perhaps forty feet. Then it had divided into two equal portions, each one of which would have formed an imposing tree in itself.

Gradually separating as they arose, until like the two legs of an inverted pair of tongs, they rose, side by side, for nearly the same distance as the trunk, when their tops were abruptly broken off. Whether from lightning or a hurricane, he could only surmise; while the bark had dropped entirely away, thus leaving the wood exposed to the weather, that had bleached it to a uniform ashen-white.

By some chance, the trunk or a huge limb of a tree had been cast into this fork, and being evenly balanced, had formed a rude sort of cross; thus giving it the name of the "Cross Oak;" the name by which it was known for leagues around. From its pleasant position and uniqueness, it had been, from time immemorial, a noted landmark and place of rendezvous for the red-men, and of later years, their pale-skinned enemies, the whites.

Such was the object upon which the young man now gazed with considerable interest and curiosity.

"Surely this is the spot. Let me see; the paper states—'cross two creeks at the pines where they are divided by a rocky bluff, on the summit of which stand three blasted trees. Then follow up the ravine until another debouches into it, upon the left. Go up this two hundred yards to a large boulder of red granite; then half a mile due north to the 'Cross Oak.' All this I have done, and there can be no mistake, unless it be in the chart. At any rate I will risk it. Now for the papers."

He tore out two leaves from a note-book, and with the aid of moistened powder, imprinted upon them the designated symbols. These slips he then secured to the north side of the tree, with splinters of wood, after which he once more resumed his seat, with an air of patient waiting, although his eyes roved unceasingly over the surrounding objects, and one hand was placed upon the lock of his light rifle.

For over an hour he sat thus, never moving a muscle save those controlling his eyes, while naught broke the solemn stillness of the vast forest save the ceaseless patter of the rain-drops shed by the overhanging branches, upon the thick layer of dead and decaying leaves that covered the ground as with a carpet. The gentle south breeze gave the fine mist-like rain a slanting direction, so that the watcher was partially sheltered by the trunk against which he leaned.

Suddenly the man gave a slight start, and, as if instinctively, brought the muzzle of his rifle around in front of his person, while his head was bent in an attitude of keen attention. Only the ear of a hunter would have caught the faint rustling that had aroused him, as of some light foot pressing upon the moist leaves.

Still he did not seek cover, as would seem but natural when the state of the country was recalled; when the tireless foot of the wily and ferocious savage almost unceasingly trod the war-path, throughout the "dark and bloody ground" of Kentucky. If his action betrayed boldness, it also testified to the man's thoughtlessness, or ignorance of wood lore.

It was not the latter, however, but as he had come to the rendezvous in expectation of a friendly and important meeting, he did not think of danger. His only action was to draw a small rosette of mingled red and white ribbon from his pocket and hook it to the left breast of his gray tunic, where its contrast to the sober color made it an object not to be overlooked.

"I forgot that," he murmured, beneath his breath. "Very foolish; it might have cost me my life, and that is an article I could ill afford to dispense with, just at present. Ha!"

The concluding exclamation was caused by an apparently simple occurrence. Faint and quavering, the caw of the "rain-crow" arose upon the still air, and then again nothing was heard but the steady, monotonous drip—drip, of the heavy rain-globules.

Then placing one hand to his mouth, the watcher gave utterance to the shrill chatter of the fox-squirrel, ending with the sharp, quick bark of that animal when it is suddenly disturbed. As if in reply to this there came a shrill hiss as when the rattlesnake gives warning, so close behind the young man,

that, notwithstanding his expectancy, he gave a quick leap to his feet, with a convulsive shudder.

"Ha! ha! mister man," rumbled a deep, sonorous voice from behind the tree against which he had been leaning: "purty well done fer a two-legged rattler, wasn't it?"

The half-poised rifle was instantly lowered, as the first comer heard the unmistakable tones of a white man, and with a careless laugh he replied:

"'Twas so. And if you strike as well as you rattle, the snake must own himself outdone. But come out, man, and let's see what you look like."

"Jest as you say; ain't I purty?" laughed the stranger, as he stepped forward and extended a huge paw, that would scarcely have shamed a grizzly bear.

The young man clasped it, and a warm grip followed—the finger of each momentarily tightening until the fingers seemed embedded in each other. The two men, so diverse in looks and form, stood gazing half-laughingly in each other's eyes.

Then their aspect slowly changed; that of the young man breaking out into a pleasant smile, while the other flushed with a half-angry glow. At length the huge, burly form of the latter bent itself and his grip relaxed, while he said with a half-smothered curse:

"Drat it, man, I gi'n up! I cover—thunder 'n' lightnin', man, let up!"

"Ah, did I hurt you?" half-sneered the other, as he dropped the limp hand from his own, while the owner shook it several times and then separated the fingers with his left hand.

"Hurt, is it?" grimly smiled the stranger. "Stranger, ef I was a blacksmith, durned ef I'd ax a better *vice* than your paw! Hyar's t'other one, ef you won't smash it, too. You can boast of this, cap'n, you can, fer it's what no man ever did afore—make me knock under in a fa'r hand-squose. An' that leetle white paw—whew!" he ejaculated, as he felt of the young man's hand as though it was some wondrous machine. "You're my boss arter this. Tell me to jump down my own throat, or lift myself up by the breeches, an' blamed ef I don't do it!"

"I'll take your word for it; but now to business. This wasn't all you had to tell me?"

"Right as a jedge. I was to ax you ef you hed any thin' to show me."

"And if I handed you this?" drawing forth a thin strip of buck-skin, upon which was imprinted a broad, double-headed arrow, around which was coiled a rattlesnake.

"I was to match it—so," returned the other, promptly producing a *fac simile* of the emblem. "It's the kurnel's totem."

"Very well, then. If you are satisfied, let's proceed to business."

"I'm agreeable," quoth the borderer, "but first take a smile? It's my style al'ays," at the same time extending a large flask half-filled with a mahogany-colored liquid.

"Here's to you, then," drawing the cork and drinking moderately.

"Temperate, eh?" grinned the other. "Mine's a squar' inch," and he lowered the contents to that degree.

"Well, sit down and let's talk it over; I'm in a hurry, anyhow."

"All right; but boss, you're a new hand in these diggin's, hain't you?"

"Why so?"

"Why, you sot thar powerful cool fer bein' in a kentry whar reds is wild fer har, like they is now. S'pose I'd 'a' bin a squeeler in my paint, whar'd you 'a' bin now? Fer nigh onto ten minutes I studd thar, ahind thet blasted ellum, a-peekin' at you. One leetle motion, a squint and the crookin' o' a finger, was all, an' then—all night!"

"Ferhaps you're right—I dare say you are; but I was not on a mission prejudicial to them. I came as their friend and ally."

"Eut they wouldn't 'a' knowed thet. Hows'ever, let thet drap. My han'le is Ezra Duff, an'—"

"And mine," interrupted the younger man, unfolding a paper, and speaking slowly, "is Joe Curd."

"Zactly; jest so. Short an' good—jest suits me. Mam' sae used to feed me on curds, when I was a shaver; 'tarnal good too—'d like to hev some now. Like ye better 'n ever, durned ef I don't!"

"Just so; but Colonel—"

"Kurnel Nunan he sent me hyar to meet you, to l'arn fer shore ef you 'xcept his tarms; ef all was understood rightly, an' jest when we was to do the job," quickly replied the other, as Curd appeared to hesitate.

"Very well; if you're satisfied that I'm the right person—"

"Don't I know it? Didn't you hev the things all squar'?"

"Well, then, as I also trust you, I plainly say that I *do* accept the terms. That I am to receive a commission as captain in the regular army, with full pay dating from the first of the present year, and the sum ef two hundred pounds in gold, additional, from Colonel Nunan. In return for this, I am to act as his spy upon the settlement of Graingerville; to see that the main gates are unbarred and on the latch whenever he and his red gentlemen choose to make us a nocturnal call. Is that right?"

"Ye-as," hesitated Duff, scratching his head dubiously, "but the old man he said as how we was to come down on 'em in the night."

"That's just what I said," laughed Joe, "only in other words."

"Did, eh? Wal, I never hed much schoolin'; didn't hev no time. Dad he used to make me work awful, now I tell you, an' so when mam' she pegged out, I jest lit out to grab fer myself, an' hain't bin back nor heerd tell on him sence. You don't know nothin' about him, do you? Called hisself 'Liphalet.'"

"I'm afraid not. But see, here's a note for the colonel, stating the time I'll be ready for him, and several other little items that he may want to know. Mind and not lose it, for it is valuable."

"Ya-as," grunted Duff, twisting his head on one side and peering curiously at the superscription, that he held upside down. "An' them ar' things is the ol' man's han'le, I s'pose?"

"Of course," laughed Curd.

"Doggoned leetle fer sich a big man, I swan! L'arnin' is a powerful queer thing, now hain't it?"

"Very useful sometimes, I dare say."

"But a'ter all, it don't matter much to a rough ol' coon

like me, what lives with his life in his hand. It don't make a feller shoot no straighter, nor lift a trail any chorer does it?"

"Perhaps not."

"Wal, then, I guess it don't matter. Them's the points thet count out hyar. But say, could you make my name, sort o' like his'n thar, on my arm, so't would stick?" hesitated Duff, with a wistful look at the bold, clear writing upon the note. "It's foolish, like, I know, but 'pears like I'd feel better ef I could look at it an' say, *them's me*, once in a while, when I'm on the tramp. It'll be like comp'ny, an' I do git powerful lonesome at spells. 'Twas that, more'n any thin' else, I reckon, as driv' me to consortin' with the Injuns, fer thar ways hain't mine; leastways, when they're on the war-path."

"An' then, mebbe, when I'm throw'd—fer I 'xpect to gi'n my last kick in moccasins—some feller thet never know'd what a wicked cuss I hed bin, would see the name an' kiver me over like a white man orter be; whar the crows would be disa'p'inted o' thar meal. I tuck a powerful shine to you, young feller, from the fust, an' ef you'll pleasure me in this, you can count on one arm an' a shore trigger as long as Ez. Duff can squint through hind-sights."

"That I will, and gladly, too," warmly replied Joe Curd, extending his hand, which was grasped by that of his companion. "I believe you are an honest-meaning man, and I have—"

"'S—st!" hissed Duff, then with a sudden jerk he cast the young man at full length upon the sward, beside himself.

There was no need to question his motive for such a strange action. Even as he did so, there sounded upon the still air the quick click of a gun-lock, the sound of a flint striking against the pan, followed by the sharp, whiplike report of a rifle.

The bullet, in its passage, knocked off the light felt hat of the young man, and to one simple fact he evidently owed his life. The scarceiy perceptible interval between the click and the report, told that the weapon of the concealed marksman had "hung fire," probably from the powder having become dampened by the drizzling mist.

"To kiver, boss, an' hunt fer La'i. It's a red!" yelled Duff, as he plunged into the forest, closely followed by Joe Curd, who did not pause to regain his hat.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOREST TRAGEDY.

It was considerably earlier in the day that the silence of the woods was broken by a startling and significant sound: the report of firearms. Or, perchance 'twas the echo that followed the first discharge, seeming like a second shot.

At that time and place, such an occurrence would cause the listener to pause and deliberate before proceeding further, and the thoughts would naturally revert to the one dread subject.

And there was one whose ears were startled by the alarm. Striding swiftly and noiselessly along through the fast-falling mist, he paused abruptly and bent his ear downward, while the glittering eyes and crouching form told how fully he was upon the alert.

The dusky, half-nude body, glistening from the combined influence of rain and oil, together with the long, snaky locks of coarse black hair and barbaric ornaments, plainly testified as to his race. That he was an Indian, all could tell, and a borderer would have pronounced him a Chippewa.

Only for a moment he paused; then, with one quick, searching glance around him, he inspected the priming of his rifle, and then glided away through the gloomy forest. As if by instinct, he made his way directly toward the point from whence had sounded the rifle-shot, with such precaution that not a leaf rustled or a twig snapped to betray his progress.

Then he crouched to the ground beneath a large bush, and peering through the leafy screen, drank in with his eyes the scene before him.

It was a small glade, and evidently was the spot from whence the shot or shots proceeded. There was but one

form in the glade—a form, but not a living one. Just upon the crest of the little knoll, close by the foot of a huge tree, lay the motionless form of a man.

His dress, together with his closely-cropped red hair, proclaimed it to be a white man, while the tiny stream of crimson that slowly welled from his breast, trickling down his side to the ground, there forming a little pool upon the damp leaves, told but too plainly how he had died—that at him had the shot been aimed.

The savage then began to slowly encircle the spot, and now his consummate craft and skill in wood-lore were fully exhibited. A mouse, or the lightfooted hare would have made more noise than did this man. Then he abruptly paused and bent his eyes anxiously upon the ground.

Before him lay the plainly-imprinted track of a small moccasined foot. Only the one, and passing it without disturbing a leaf, the red-man continued his route. But nothing else rewarded his search until nearly at the spot from whence he had first beheld the form of the victim of this forest tragedy.

Two footprints were there, side by side, leading toward the tree beneath which the form lay. Then, as if fully at his ease, the red-man openly walked toward the corpse, without another glance around him. Stooping, he turned the body over so the face was exposed to view; then, rising erect, he leaned upon the muzzle of his rifle, with bowed head and fixed gaze.

It was the features of a young man who had evidently not yet passed his third decade. Death must have been instantaneous, for there was no look of pain upon the bold, clear-cut features, although traces of a slight frown yet wrinkled his forehead.

Presently the Indian again stooped, and picking up the rifle that was still tightly clutched in the man's hands, carefully examined both the lock and muzzle. Then replacing it, without trying to unclasp the fast-stiffening fingers, he cast a few limbs and sticks over the corpse, before once more proceeding upon the trail of the man who had, in all probability, fired the fatal shot.

In this he experienced but little difficulty, for the damp

leaves and grass had yielded readily to the pressure of the moccasined foot. For an hour or more he pressed onward and then again abruptly paused, bending his ear nearly to the ground in an attitude of acute attention.

He could distinguish the faint hum of human voices, and one glance at the ground around him, showed that they proceeded from the Cross Oak, or from its vicinity. Sinking to the ground he began gliding from cover to cover, with the skill and silence of a serpent, until he caught sight of the speakers.

They were two in number, being those first introduced as Joe Curd and Ezra Duff. As the spy obtained a fair view of the latter's features, his brow corrugated and a snake-like glitter in his dark eye, told that it was not a stranger that was before him, while the short, heavy rifle leaped as if by instinct to his shoulder.

The fiery eye glanced along the clouded barrel, and the double sights drew full upon Duff's temple. Never before, probably, was the burly borderer so near death's portals as at that moment. One touch—a pressure such as would suffice to bend a blade of grass, and all would be over.

But that touch was not applied; one word that fell from the lips of the young man caused the savage to pause, and partially lower his rifle. And then, with ear bent toward the conspirators, the dusky son of the forest eagerly drank in the details of the plot, and mentally registered every word.

The play of his features was remarkable, as word after word dropped so calmly from the pleasant-featured youth, who looked as one who was uttering the most harmless sentences, instead of dooming an entire settlement to death and destruction.

Then once more the rifle arose to the red-man's cheek. The two men were in range, and one bullet was intended to slay them both. The forefinger compressed the trigger; the flint fell, emitting a tiny shower of sparks, but the powder only gave a sullen hiss for a moment.

It was these slight sounds that had caught the well-trained ear of Ezra Duff, and joined to his presence of mind, saved their lives. For, as the delayed report came, he had pulled Curd out of range, and the only thing injured by the bullet

was the latter's felt hat. But the red-man thought his project had succeeded, and pealed forth his triumphant war-whoop, as, drawing his knife, he sprung erect.

But as his presumed victims darted behind cover, he realized his danger, and turning, glided swiftly away through the forest. He could not hope to cope successfully with two well-armed men while his own rifle was empty, and was not desperate enough to try.

The two men fled but for a few steps, and then, as no foe was visible, the real facts of the case became apparent. Had the enemy equaled or exceeded them in number, an immediate assault would have followed, while yet they were confused by the shot.

"Thar cain't be more'n two, boss," muttered Duff to his companion, "so let's make a move. You go that a-way, an' I'll try over hyar. Ef you sees a glimp' o' red hide, plug it."

Without more words the two separated, and in the course of a few moments again met at the place where the spy had fled. All doubts as to the number of their enemy, were now dispelled, and the trail was followed at full speed for several miles, until it was finally lost in the gravelly bed of a creek.

Into this the Indian had stepped, and then abruptly turning, waded up-stream in a direction quartering back toward the spot from whence he had discharged the ambushed shot. Only once he paused, crouching low beneath an overhanging bush, whose leaves rippled the water surface, and from this covert he glared out at the forms of the two men who were pressing hotly forward along his fresh trail, little dreaming how narrowly they were missing the object of their search.

Then, as the sounds of their footsteps died away, the savage emerged from the water, and darted at full speed back upon his own trail, to Cross Oak. Once here he quickly secured the signal paper from the tree-trunk, then picked up the hat abandoned by Curd in his haste, and close beside it lay the slip of skin that had answered for a totem.

Securing this, the Indian once more plunged into the forest, where we will leave him and return to the baffled trail-hunters.

They paused beside the creek, where the fugitive's footprints had been obliterated by the swiftly-flowing water, and glanced at each other as if asking which way they should go. It was a question more easily asked than answered, and finally Ezra Duff said :

"'Tain't no manner o' use goin' further. He's got cl'ar by this time, fer, even if we did strike the trail ag'in, he's had plenty o' time to git miles away, or, 'tany rate, so fur that we couldn't cotch him afore dark. The sun ain't more'n two hours high now."

"You're right, I guess ; but I wonder if he heard what we were talking about?" responded Joe Curd, gloomily.

"Mebbe not. Leastwise, 'twon't do no harm ef he *did*, fer he was a red."

"How do you know that?" eagerly queried the young man.

"Wagh ! didn't you hear the screech he gi'e ? *Thet* didn't come from a white throat, nary time ; it said Injun all over it."

"You're right again. I believe I must be going crazy ; my ideas are all mixed up so."

"I understan'," nodded Duff, significantly. "It wouldn't be over an' above healthy ef it'd bin a white, and overheard us, fer you, 'tany rate. Lordy ! What'd them fellers at the settlement say ?"

"Don't speak of it ! But come, it is late and I must go."

"But your head kiver ; whar is that?" asked Duff as they turned from the stream.

"Didn't I leave it where we were sitting ? It seems to me I did," hesitated Curd.

"Don't know, but it's a p'int easily found out. Come on."

The Cross Oak was soon regained, but the lost article was not to be found, for at that very moment it was over a mile distant, thrust inside an Indian shirt. The two men were both uneasy and slightly alarmed, for the keen eyes of Ezra Duff, as he went peering around, with tightly pressed lips, very soon discovered the fresh trail left by their mysterious foe.

"Fooled ag'in. The dirty varmint has doubled on his trail, come back byar, an' made a clean sweep. An' look a thar

ef he hain't tuck both o' the talkin' papers from the tree, I'm a liar! I tell you, boss, thar's sumthin' up beyant the common," muttered the old borderer, shaking his head with an impressive air.

"I'm afraid you're right, Duff," sternly responded Joe Curd, "but then, it needn't concern you; for it is I alone that am in danger."

"An' ef so, don't *that* consarn me?" exclaimed the other, energetically. "I tell you you're my boss, you ar', an' ef so be them fellers does you a hurt, then it's me they must settle with, next."

"Well, we can do no good by talking it over here, so let us leave. The colonel will tell you when we meet next, and you've got to come, for I'd rather meet you than a stranger."

"Jest so, boss, but I'm going to see you safe in sight o' the settlement afore I shakes hands."

To this Curd offered no objection, and the two men rapidly made their way through the tangled undergrowth. But despite their speed, it was nearly dark before the edge of the clearing surrounding the little village, or rather fortress, of Graingerville was reached.

The two men parted with a warm hand-clasp, and then he who had called himself Joe Curd, rapidly crossed the intervening space and soon stood before the great gate. The place was an oblong square, inclosing several acres of ground. Upon either side and end, at intervals, stood stout substantial log houses, the spaces between being closed by a double row of strong palisades.

Outside of these was a broad, deep ditch, filled half full of water backed up from the good-sized creek that ran close to one end of the fort. The trees and under-growth, for a rifle-shot around, had been cleared away, and with the exception of a few stumps, no cover was afforded by which an enemy could approach unseen.

In answer to the challenge of an unseen sentry, the young man pronounced a name that was not the one he had used at his interview with Duff; and that it was known, was plainly evidenced by the prompt manner in which the heavy gate was unbarred to afford him entrance. As he passed within, the guard asked in a respectful tone:

"Any thing new, Mr Vilott?"

"Nothing at all, Melter; but where is the judge—at home?"

"I believe so; at any rate he is within. I saw him pass by with the 'Beaver,' not long since."

"Thank you," and the young man rapidly made his way toward one of the log houses that stood at one of the corners, from the open door of which a bright light was streaming.

He entered without hesitation and with an easy air that showed he was perfectly at home, and at once hung up his rifle behind the door. Then he turned toward the fire-place where a young girl was standing, gazing at him with a half-shy, half-wistful expression upon her face, and who made way for the young hunter.

"Well, Katie, where's your father?"

"At uncle's; but you're all wet—shan't I get your clothes?"

"No, it does not matter. When will he be back, do you think?"

"Surely, soon; supper is waiting now."

The man did not answer, but stood leaning against the wall, moodily kicking at the end of a blazing log, while a stern, half-uneasy expression rested upon his features. The girl whom he had called Katie, stood near by, furtively scanning his features, with a deep, yearning look in her blue eyes that plainly betrayed her secret, if secret it could be called—that told how tenderly she loved the handsome man who appeared so indifferent to her.

And yet she was fair, very fair and pleasing to gaze upon. Although scarcely past her girlhood, her form was full and perfectly developed, of about medium size. A blonde, with light-brown hair—almost yellow—deep-blue eyes, and complexion that even the hot sun of that clime had not impaired.

Yes, Katie Grainger was pretty, almost beautiful, and no person was better aware of this fact than the man who was now her companion.

"Fletcher, what is the matter—what has gone wrong with you to-day?"

"Why, nothing, pet," he answered, as he took the hand in his own that she timidly placed upon his arm, "I am only tired, and—"

"There, sir, that will do," interrupted a stern voice from the doorway, and as the two young people turned hastily, they saw that the doorway was filled with rough-dressed and well-armed men.

"Father!"

"Go to your room, girl. I have business with this person," and a tall, gray-haired man advanced to their side and motioned her away.

The maiden did as she was bade, but with a look of alarm upon her face. The young man, also, appeared surprised, as he noted the stern, angry looks worn by the party, that now nearly filled the room.

"Uncle, what—" he began, but was coldly interrupted by the man who had spoken before.

"Do not call me that. Even if you were a relative of mine, I would disown you. But, thank God! no blood of mine flows in your veins!"

"This is strange language, sir," haughtily returned the young man, as he drew himself up to his full height, and glanced around upon the scowling faces that glowered upon him. "I came here to see you upon important business, but if this is the way I am to be treated, the sooner we part, the better it is for us both."

"Not so fast, young sir," and the heavy hand closed firmly upon his shoulder. "We also have business with you that must be transacted before you say good-by."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this: *whom did you meet to-day at the Cross Oak, and what was your business there?*"

The young man started slightly at this sudden query, and a deep flush passed over his features, leaving them paler than before, but he did not answer.

"*And who killed Joe Curd?*"

"Ah!"

This one word was all he uttered, and it appeared wrung from his lips, rather by the sight of a face in the crowd, than the charge thus indirectly brought against him.

"You do not answer. Very well—Beaver, come here," continued Mr. Grainger.

At his voice, the man the sight of whom among the specta-

tors had caused the accused to utter the exclamation, came forward and stood beside the two. First he drew from his bosom the felt hat worn that day by Vilott, then the two papers, and last a strip of buck-skin, handing them to Grainger.

"Look," added that personage, "do you recognize any of these?" then as the accused did not reply, he added: "Beaver, tell us all you saw and heard."

At this order, the person addressed, a Chippewa Indian, tersely related what we have already laid before the reader; the silence that was preserved while he slowly spoke in broken English, rendering the scene more impressive. For a minute after he concluded, no one spoke.

"Listen, Mr. Grainger," slowly began the young man, speaking in a low, but firm tone. "I know that appearances are against me, but believe me, I can explain it all; I only ask a little time—"

"So 't you kin send fer yer red brethren to come an' help you out of it?" broke in a sneering voice from the crowd.

"Silence, Burton," commanded Grainger, waving his hand: and then turning to Vilott, he added: "Then you do not deny the charges?"

"I deny nothing; neither do I admit it. I only ask for time."

"You shall have time until to-morrow noon; then you must answer. Until then you will be kept a prisoner."

"You might as well press it now, as then, unless I am allowed my liberty to hunt up proof," hotly replied the accused.

"Your liberty!"

"Yes, my liberty. Do you think I would forfeit my word?"

"And why not, if you could plot with a renegade, to deliver us all up to the savages; women, children and all?" cried out one of the group.

"If you fear my running away, send a guard with me," urged Vilott.

"No, we have not men to risk in that manner. But you shall have fair play on the morrow."

"No, no," yelled several voices; "string up the black-hearted murderer now."

"Peace, men!" shouted Grainger, pressing back the most forward, as the crowd swayed toward the accused. "Give him fair play."

"Did he give Joe Curd fair play? Kill him! shoot him!"

"No, no!" shrieked a woman's voice, and Katie rushed into the room, followed by an elderly lady. "No, no, he is innocent—you shall not hurt him!"

The rough men paused and fell back, while the pale and terrified girl clung around her lover's neck, pleading piteously for his life.

"Katie—girl, go to your room," ordered the father. "This is no place for you. Mother, see that she does not come out here again."

"Yes, darling," whispered Fletcher; "go now, I am safe; they will not harm me."

With gentle force the sobbing maiden was led from the room and the door secured. Then Judge Grainger resumed:

"Well, we must find a secure place where he can spend the night, under cover. It is going to be a dreadful night, and I would not expose a dog to such weather."

"There is room at my house, judge," respectfully observed a tall, gaunt man, as he stepped forward. "We don't use the loft now that—since—"

They all knew the reason why Seth Bender faltered and abruptly turned aside, and respected his feelings. He meant since his eldest child—an only daughter—had died, but a short time since; and the sight of whose grave saddened the hearts of all who beheld it, for she was a general favorite, and her death the first that had occurred since the founding of the little colony.

"Very well, Mr. Bender, we will accept your kind offer. Come, sir," to Vilott, who suffered himself to be led from the house without a word of remonstrance.

CHAPTER III

CRAZY DICKY'S EXPLOITS.

A FEW steps brought the party to the door of Seth Bender's cabin, and it was suddenly opened wide at their approach, and a stripling holding it back while they entered. It was a singular-looking person, and one that would have been comical, had not his misfortune been stamped upon every feature. He was an idiot.

A slight, but exceedingly active body, clothed in garments over which were fastened numberless scraps and tatters of brightly-dyed cloth and strings. These, fluttering in the breeze, and with every movement, joined to his nimble, erratic motions, at times gave him the appearance of some gayly-plumed bird, especially when, as was his delight, he sprung from limb to limb of the forest-trees.

His features were well-cut, and but for the one same vacant look, would have been pronounced handsome. And yet at times he acted with the lucidity of those who called themselves sane people, and a cunning that was remarkable, under the circumstances.

But now he wore the dull, vacant expression, as he closed the door after the men, then seated himself in the corner, whispering and crooning to his pet squirrel; but once or twice he glanced toward the prisoner with a wistful look, as though pitying his condition.

A debate was going on as to whether Vilott should be bound, or whether they should trust to the strength of the building and watchfulness of the guards, but finally the matter was compromised by binding his arms, while his feet were left free. This was quickly carried out, and the prisoner made to ascend the ladder to an attic, or rather loft, where he was left, the ladder being removed.

It was not a difficult matter to find men who would endure the driving storm for the sake of the additional security against the prisoner's escaping, either by his own ingenuity, or

the assistance of outside friends, that they would thus feel. They were all aware, by this time, of the crimes he had been charged with committing, and although, heretofore, Fletcher Vilott had been looked upon as a model young man, and a general favorite, many were the curses poured out on his head that night.

He had been one of the survivors of a small settlement, that had been massacred by the Indians while he was yet a boy, and since that time he had been, in a manner, adopted by Judge Grainger, with whom he had made his home. A feeling of love had grown up between him and Catharine, the only child of his benefactor, and until now he had been rather encouraged in his suit, than otherwise, and at the time we meet them, the wedding-day had been set.

Nearly an hour had elapsed since the posting of the guards around Seth Bender's house, and the storm that had so long been threatening, was now raging with terrible fury. The tempestuous wind dashed the heavy rain and hail-stones in torrents, while the trees of the forest were stripped of leaves and limbs, and every now and then a thundering crash would announce the fall of some giant monarch of the woods.

It was a night long to be remembered by those hardy men, who, nevertheless, stuck to their posts, nursing their wrath against the main cause of their being thus exposed, and gloating over what the morrow might bring forth, when the traitor should meet the doom he so justly merited. Suddenly they started, and listened intently.

The heavy door of the cabin was gently opened, and a form stepped forth. The two men confronted him, but their alarm was quickly dispelled as they heard the unmistakable tones of "Crazy Dicky," as the idiot was most generally termed.

"Where are you going, Dicky?" asked one, when fully satisfied of the boy's identity.

"Crazy Dicky is going to play. Don't you hear the rain, and the pretty little cold stones calling him to come? Don't stop Dicky; let him go, or they'll get mad and won't come back any more," pleaded the idiot, holding out his hands to catch the hail.

"But you'll catch your death, boy, if you stay out here."

"No, no, they know Dicky—they want to play. See, I catch the pretty stones and warm them!" and as he spoke, he held the drops of ice to his cheek until they melted. "Look; Dicky puts 'em to sleep."

"Come, Jim," impatiently exclaimed the other man, "let's get to cover. I'm nearly froze, and wet as a rag."

"Well, don't stay out long, little 'un," and they cowered down once more, beneath the walls of the house, where they were in a measure protected from the violence of the storm. For a time they could hear the vacant laugh of the idiot as he wandered about the inclosure, and then all was still save the howling of the tempest.

But Dicky was not idle, by any means, although an observer might have been puzzled to conjecture what he was after. Certainly it was not to play with the hail-stones and the wind.

He crept along close beside the row of houses, using great precautions, although an ordinary footstep would have been inaudible. Then he paused and raised himself up to his full height, and for a moment appeared to be listening intently.

Then, as if reassured, he began tapping gently upon what seemed to be a wooden shutter. At brief intervals he would cease, and harken, but only to resume, with a little more force.

Suddenly the shutter was slightly moved, and a low voice asked who was there?

"It's Dicky, lady, only Crazy Dicky," he replied, in a soft tone.

"But what do you want, Dicky? I am very sad, and do not feel like talking to-night."

"Dicky knows; he's seen him, up at our house."

"Who? Not—" eagerly asked the voice.

"Yes; the fine, nice gentleman who speaks so kindly, and who gave Dicky the bright new knife that he wanted so much."

"What have they done with him, Dicky?—did they hurt him?" added Katie, falteringly, for she well knew to whom the boy alluded.

"I guess not; but they tied his hands fast, and put him up in the loft where Dicky used to sleep before Annie went away."

Dicky's going to let him loose when he goes back, for it must hurt to be tied up like that."

"And can you, Dicky, can you set him free, do you think?"

"Of course! Dicky can do any thing when pretty lady tells him to," promptly replied the boy.

"Oh, if you only will—if you only will!"

"If he does, will pretty lady take Dicky's hands like she did once, if he gets all the ugly dirt off?" eagerly asked the idiot.

"Yes, yes; a thousand times—if you will only set him free! But can you do it without letting anybody see you?"

"Yes, Dicky will cut a hole in the roof, and then the nice gentleman can come to see the pretty lady."

"No, no, he must not do that; but tell him to flee from here, for the men will kill him to-morrow."

"They sha'n't! Dicky'll fight for him until they let him go!" fiercely cried the idiot.

"But you must not. If you can get him free, no one must see him. Do you understand me, Dicky?"

"Yes; he can come out of the hole and then jump down to the ground, outside. It is so soft, now, that he won't get hurt."

"That is it. But now go and tell him what I said. Tell him that I say he *must* go. Here, do you see my hand?" and Katie thrust her arm through the window.

The idiot gently took it and pressed the little hand again and again to his lips, softly patting it with his hand in such a manner that told how he worshiped the bright maiden who spoke so kindly to him, while others laughed at his grotesque looks and speech.

"Dicky will do it now," he whispered, as he relinquished the hand. "He could fly 'way up to the bright, pretty stars now, when lady is so good to him."

"Yes, go, Dicky, and set him free if you can possibly do so. And be sure to tell him that I say for him to flee from here until he can prove his innocence of these frightful crimes."

"Dicky knows what the lady means, for he hid behind the house and heard the men talking. *He* didn't do it—kill that

bad man with the hair on fire—he is too good. Dicky will tell them to-morrow who done it; he will ask Tommy. Tommy knows every thing that happens,” rambled on the idiot, the tone of his voice changing to his usual one of imbecility.

“Yes, yes, I know,” interrupted Katie, anxiously, “but you will help him to get away from the bad men who would kill him first, won’t you, Dicky?”

“Yes, Dicky will go now. Good-by, pretty lady,” and he glided away into the darkness, leaving the maiden in a state of painful suspense, doubtful how long he would remain of the same mind; or, indeed, how far it lay in his power to do as he declared he would.

But Dicky’s wits were unusually bright upon that night, as they ever were during a storm, and he set about his task with an adroitness worthy the skill of those who considered themselves far wiser. He entered the building once more, not heeding the questions put to him by the men upon guard, and then securely barred the door upon the inside.

But in doing this, he awoke his father, who was lying upon a rude sort of bed, and who sprung to his feet, rifle in hand, but half-asleep. The smoldering embers in the huge fireplace flickered faintly, and by the feeble rays they cast out, he quickly discovered who the intruder was.

“My boy, you have not been out in all this storm, have you? You are as wet as a drowned rat!”

“Dicky has been out talking to the wind and rain and the pretty little stones that dance around so merrily. But he is tired playing now, so he is going to lie down and shut his eyes, so that he can see and talk to Annie again,” replied the idiot, as he sat down upon a sort of pallet arranged upon the floor in one corner of the room.

The father did not speak, but sunk back and closed his eyes. The random allusion of the idiot to the dead one they had so lately lost, had touched his heart, and for a time he struggled with his sorrow. But then the weariness of his body prevailed, and he sunk into a deep slumber.

Dicky lay curled up upon his pallet, with “Tommy,” his pet squirrel, nestling in his breast, while he crooned to it in his low soft tones, as time passed on. But then he heard the

prolonged breathing of his father, and knew by it that he was asleep.

Gently placing his pet down, Dicky slipped to the rude dresser, and taking from it the heavy broad-bladed butcher-knife, he adroitly clambered up the side of the house, thus gaining the loft without using the ladder.

Then he crept softly along until he reached the motionless form of the prisoner, who was sound asleep. One hand he held above the man's lips as he shook him slightly with the other, at the same time whispering close to his ear:

"Don't be afraid, it's only Dicky—Crazy Dicky, you know—who has just come from the pretty lady."

At the touch, Vilott strove to arise, bewildered at his sudden awaking, but the small, strong hands of the the idiot held him down with a resistless force, bound as he was, while the reassuring voice again repeated the warning.

Then Vilott appeared to comprehend his meaning, and a ray of hope sprung up in his bosom as he thought that he might still foil the vengeance of the enraged settlers by the aid thus strangely sent.

"Did Katie—Miss Grainger send you to help me?"

"Yes, the pretty lady is sorry that the bad men tied your hands and put you up here to sleep on the hard boards. So Dicky told her that he would set you free, because you were good to him and gave him the sharp bright knife he liked so well."

"But *can* you do this?" anxiously queried Vilott. "Will your father let you, and the men on guard around the house?"

"Father sleeps, and the other men are down there, hiding from the cold rain and wind. Dicky don't hide; he likes to play and talk with—"

"Yes, but then how can I escape?" interrupted Fletcher Vilott.

"See, Dicky has got a big knife and he is strong. He will cut a hole through the roof, and then you can jump down outside the walls and run away."

"So I can! But first cut these cursed cords; they have eaten almost to the bone," and he held up his bound hands as well as he was able.

The idiot was about to sever the cords, when he suddenly paused.

"Well, well," impatiently whispered Vilott, "why don't you cut them?"

"Wait, Dicky forgets," slowly returned the boy, but then he quickly added, "ah, yes, the pretty lady with the soft, white hands told me that you must run away, far off, and hide in the woods, for the bad men would kill you to-morrow if you didn't. Must promise Dicky that you'll do as she says first, or he won't help you."

"I promise," with a short, hard laugh, "I promise all that. My skin is far too precious for me to wish to hang around here any longer than I can help. Now unfasten them."

"Will you do as *she* says?" persisted Dicky.

"Yes, yes; quick, or we may be interrupted. It is growing late, and I must be far from here before dawn."

Dicky hesitated no longer, but severed the bonds at once, and after a few moments spent in chafing his excoriated wrists, Vilott took the knife and cautiously began cutting a hole through the roof. It was formed of oak clapboards, thoroughly seasoned, and it was a toilsome task as well as tedious; but he was working for liberty and his arm did not tire.

When the first board was severed, the rest was comparatively easy, and now the roaring, howling tempest served the prisoner a good turn, for the grating of the knife was drowned, even to the ears of Vilott and Crazy Dicky. The guards were posted almost directly beneath the spot where the hole was being cut, but the chips that fell down occasionally were confounded with the still dropping hail.

In the course of a very few minutes, the aperture was enlarged sufficiently to admit the passage of a man's body, and Vilott desisted with a long-drawn breath of relief. He hesitated for a moment, and then turning to his companion, he whispered:

"Say now, Dicky, can't you get me a gun—a rifle, to shoot with? The woods may be full of Indians and bears, and the pretty lady would cry if she knew I'd got hurt."

"Dicky knows where there is one," replied the boy, in a louder tone than was exactly prudent under the circum-

stances. "The great big one that father killed the bear with. Will the pretty lady be glad if I get it for you?"

"Yes, she will. But hurry now, for I must go. Get the powder and bullets, too."

Dicky turned to the hole by which he had ascended, but in his eagerness he stumbled and fell with a loud noise upon the loosely laid flooring. The sound of a man leaping from bed was now heard, and then the voice of Seth Bender calling:

"Dicky—Dicky, lad, where are you?"

"Here, father—I'm coming down after your gun for the nice gentleman to shoot bears and Injuns with," called out Crazy Dicky, in a loud, clear tone, greatly to the horror of Vilott.

Knowing that his liberty, and, perhaps, ultimately his life, depended upon the promptness of his action, the young man thrust the knife into his belt, and then drew himself up through the aperture. He could hear the loud cries of Bender, as he called to alarm the guards, at the same time unbarring the door.

Fletcher Vilott slipped to the edge of the roof, overhanging the deep ditch, and collected all his energies for a leap. He well knew that did he escape with sound limbs from the shock, that he would be exceedingly lucky, the descent being nearly twenty feet, and to be taken in the dark. Besides, he must clear the ditch. But he did not hesitate. He could hear the men below, placing the ladder to the trap-door, while torches flashed around the house. To be discovered now, would, most probably, be the precursor of a bullet.

As he made the leap, a clear crack rung out through the warring elements, closely followed by a wild, thrilling yell, that he well knew proceeded from the throat of Ah-zah, or "The Beaver," who had produced such damning testimony against him. But the trigger had been touched an instant too late, and the bullet only hurtled past the intended victim, to expend its force upon the neighboring forest.

The fugitive alighted with a terrible jar, just upon the edge of the ditch, and slipped partially down its side, but with a desperate effort he recovered himself and then bounded away toward the friendly forest. Almost like an echo, he

heard some person alighting in nearly the same spot, and then came a short, single whoop, that sounded like a challenge, uttered to let him know that a deadly foe was upon his track.

An involuntary shudder ran over his frame as he heard this, for he well knew what it purported. It told him as plainly as if spoken in so many words, that the Chippewa had sworn to recapture or kill him; that now it was to be a trial of skill and bravery betwixt them, in which the weaker or less wary one must go under. That there could be but one ending.

And he had good cause to be uneasy, for he right well knew of what metal the savage was composed, and that in wood-lore and craft, he owned no superior, and not few equal. And the fugitive was unarmed, save the butcher-knife with which he had hewn his way to freedom.

CHAPTER IV.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

NOTHING was further from Fletcher Vilott's wishes than a collision with his dusky foe, at that moment, while the latter would have all the advantages of superior weapons, and all his thoughts were turned toward avoiding this.

Owing to the gloom, hearing was the only sense either could depend upon, and that was in a measure rendered useless by the raging elements.

The fugitive ran as speedily and with as little noise as possible, toward the forest. Despite several stumbles, he gained this in safety, and drew himself up close beside a huge tree, with the trusty knife firmly clutched in his right hand, resolved if discovered to make as desperate a fight for life or freedom, as lay in his power.

He looked toward the little fort—for such it might almost be called—and from the great confusion that prevailed, he could tell that the entire settlement was aroused and upon the alert.

Lights were flashing to and fro upon the outside of the walls and he could distinguish the shadowy forms of the bearers as they bent close to the ground, apparently searching for the trail.

He listened intently, but could hear nothing save the confused hum of these searchers ; no one appeared to be near him. He heard the subdued call that announced the finding of his trail, and fearing to remain longer, stepped out from the tree.

But as he did so, he heard the rustle of a light footfall upon the damp carpet of leaves, and abruptly halted. From his position he could discern the dim, phantom-like form of a man, outlined against the light of the slowly-advancing torches, and knew that it was the form of the Chippewa, who apparently was listening for the sound of footsteps, should the fugitive be anywhere near at hand.

For a moment Vilott clenched his knife more tightly, and was about to leap upon his enemy, but prudence prevailed, as he realized that the sound of a struggle would instantly call up the settlers, when he would easily be overpowered. Then, to his great delight, the savage turned and walked toward the trail-hunters.

No time was to be lost, and Vilott glided cautiously away from the tree, plunging deeper into the forest. Still he was forced to proceed at a moderate walk, to avoid collision with the trees and overhanging branches ; yet despite all his precautions, he was not entirely successful in this.

He would stumble over some half-buried log, run against bushes, or be brought up with a force far from pleasant by a tree-trunk, or with his head half sawed off by a troublesome vine. Yet he knew that unless he should put a good distance between him and the pursuers before day, it might still be reduced to a mere race for life.

One thought was ever uppermost in his mind ; and that was to gain the creek in which Ah-zah had concealed his trail on the past day. Once here, he thought he could break the scent so effectually that it would be next to impossible for it to be discovered before he had reached a place of comparative security.

After traversing thrice the distance necessary, had he been able to pursue a direct course, the creek was reached, and

with a heartfelt sigh of relief, Vilott flung himself down upon the saturated ground to recover breath and strength for renewed exertion.

The tempest had greatly subsided ; the rain was falling in the same dull, slow drizzle that it had the day before, while the wind only soughed dolefully through the murmuring treetops.

It was not a very comfortable situation, nor one calculated to cheer the fugitive's spirits, and he still reclined there, his head sinking dejectedly upon his breast as he thought over what the last four hours had brought forth for him. Then, overpowered by fatigue, and in a measure lulled by the wailing breeze, his eyes closed in slumber.

But this only lasted for a few minutes, and then he awoke with a start, imagining he had slept for a much longer time than was prudent. With a half-muttered groan he stretched his weary and sore limbs, and then entered the water. It was breast high, and after wading for a few yards, he struck out and swam rapidly down-stream.

The water was warm and felt grateful to his overtaxed body, and gaining fresh energy as he proceeded, Vilott swam nearly a mile before pausing. Then groping along the shore, he soon encountered a pendent bough, and drawing himself up by the arms, he was speedily ensconced in a leafy fork, where he could rest with comparative ease.

His mind was relieved from fear of discovery, knowing that hours of daylight must elapse before the broken trail could be traced out, he resigned himself to sleep with a soothing sense of security. It was now nearly dawn, some hours having elapsed since his escape, and it was not until after the sun showed above the treetops that the fugitive reopened his eyes.

At first Vilott was bewildered and at a loss to account for his strange position, but a few moments sufficed to recall the events of the past night, and he hastened to descend from his perch. The movement called forth a cry of pain, and he staggered from the effects of fatigue and hunger, he not having eaten any thing since dawn of the preceding day.

But laving his face and neck freely, in the creek water somewhat revived him, and then he proceeded rapidly down

the bed of the stream. For nearly an hour he kept the water, then emerged and struck out into the forest, on the side opposite to that where he had entered.

For several hundred yards he carefully obliterated all traces of his passage, and then struck out at a steady, rapid pace.

That his future course was fully mapped out in his mind his actions plainly evidenced, for there was neither halting nor indecision displayed in his movements.

It was an exceedingly pleasant day, although rather sultry, owing to the recent storm, yet by no means disagreeably so. The trees and bushes were yet wet with rain-drops, and the ground so moist that despite all his care the fugitive left a broad and plain trail behind him.

Yet for this he cared but little, as, unless by mere chance, his pursuers would not discover this for hours, if indeed they succeeded in doing so that day. But for his hunger the young man would have been almost gay; as it was, he strode onward at a speedy rate.

Until the sun was near the meridian, Vilott kept up this pace, but then, as he began to feel the effect of the sun's hot rays, he began to look about for some spring or creek at which he might quench his thirst, dropping down into a slow walk. Presently he reached the bank of a small stream, and stooped to take a drink.

But all such thoughts were quickly banished from his mind, for a loud, clear yell resounded through the forest, and at the same moment a brace of bullets whistled past him in rather closer proximity than was exactly pleasant; his stooping having rendered them futile. A quick glance over his shoulder showed Vilott the swiftly-approaching forms of two paint-bedaubed savages, whose intentions could not well be mistaken.

Knowing the folly of attempting resistance in his almost totally unarmed state, Vilott crossed the stream with an agile bound, and then darted away at the top of his speed. He was a good runner, swift and hardy, but there were equally as fleet and better trained feet upon his track, and it was only prolonging the end.

But this fact Vilott could not know, as he dared not glance backward for fear of making a false step, which would at

once decide the race. The underbrush was thick and stubborn, and the trees grew so close together, that the course was necessarily erratic; a fact, however, that probably saved the fugitive his life, for the arrows that were sent after him, either fell harmlessly upon one side or else were intercepted by some tree-trunk.

The white man's breath began to come hot and heavy, before a mile had been traversed, and to his wonder he felt himself begin to fail. The toil and hardships he had undergone, added to the want of food, had weakened his muscles far more than he had thought, and he realized that unless assistance should appear in some shape, and that very speedily, in all probability his scalp would hang dangling at the belt of one of his pursuers, before many more minutes.

It was not a very inspiring thought, and the young man continued his exertions; increase them he could not. Then, all of a sudden, he dashed out from the woods into a level plain or plateau, free from trees and bushes, and covered with a thick carpet of dried fog.

It was scarcely a mile across, although it extended upon either hand to the vision's limit, almost as uniformly level as a floor. Over this Vilott now sped, straining every muscle to its utmost tension, running straight as the homeward course of the honey-laden bee.

He did not think of avoiding bullets or arrows by a zigzag course; he would lose too much ground by such a proceeding, and a yard, now, might be the preservation of his life. Neither did his pursuers fire at him; they appeared confident of effecting his recapture, and a living scalp would suit their purpose better than a dead one. It was now a simple question of speed and endurance.

Each man was doing his best, yet their relative positions were comparatively unchanged. The forest was again being rapidly approached; a few more moments and its cover would be reached.

As if in rage, the savages set up a series of hoots and yells. Was it an echo that came back from the trees? For a moment the fugitive thought so, but then as the trees were almost within his grasp, a score of dusky forms stepped out into the open.

He cast a quick glance to the right and to the left. But there was no chance of escape in either direction. Several half-nude forms were rapidly gliding out, so as to cut off all retreat and surround the hapless white man.

Vilott's decision was instantly taken. Turning upon his heel, he boldly advanced to meet the two braves who had chased him from the creek. They paused, and slightly separated as if to receive a sudden onset, while their weapons flashed brightly in the sun's rays.

But if they expected this, they were disappointed, for Vilott held up his unarmed hands in token of submission, and allowed them to grasp him without an effort at resistance. The two savages appeared highly pleased at this maneuver, and expressed as much by their grunts and words of approbation, as they conducted their prisoner to where the main body of the Indians were awaiting their approach.

Vilott glanced keenly around him at the grim, paint-be-smear'd faces, but whatever were his thoughts, they were not allowed expression upon his face. There was one savage, in particular, upon whose features he dwelt longer than the others; a tall, herculean-built man, of a stern, harsh face, who was apparently high in authority, judging from the great deference shown him by the others.

After listening to the report of the two scouts, who had captured Vilott, he turned to the latter, and eyed him for a moment in silence. Then he spoke, in very broken English, but with a soft, almost musical voice, that sounded strangely, coming from the lips of the grim, scarred veteran.

"Who you, eh?"

"A man with a white skin, but a red heart," promptly replied Vilott.

"If Injun heart, den why fo' he run 'way from dem?" nodding toward the two scouts.

"Because they shot at me from the bushes, and I thought: one of them was Ah-zah, the Chippewa brave."

"Know him—what call Beaver?" eagerly queried the Indian.

"Yes, he is on my trail now. He hunts my scalp. The long-knives are there, too."

"What fo' dat, eh? Why pale-face hunt pale-face?"

"Because I was going to open the big gates of the white mens' lodge, so that the Shawnee braves could come into the fort and kill their enemies. This Beaver heard our talk and told the men. Then they were going to kill me, but I got away, and was coming to hunt up my red brothers, to ask protection. I wish to live with them and paint my face red, so that all can see I am Indian."

"White skin, he talk um good, like mock'-bird, but maybe so he *lie*," doubtfully returned the savage, keenly eying the prisoner.

"Has the chief got two tongues, that he thinks all talk crooked?" hotly rejoined Vilott, with either real or assumed anger.

The Indian gazed fixedly at the unquailing captive, and then resumed, not heeding the taunt:

"If gib up big house, den brudder—Injun heart, Injun all ober. Little brave no git warrior to take house; mus' be big chief, do dat. Den tell Sleepy Eye um name—how call chief dat lead Shawnee braves?"

Vilott glanced around him, and then, stepping to an elm tree, he pried off a segment of bark. With the point of the butcher-knife that he had been allowed to retain, he rapidly and clearly sketched upon the smooth, white inner bark, a broad, double-headed arrow, with a rattlesnake coiled around its stem in readiness to strike; and then handed it to the chief.

"There, does the chief know whose totem that is? It was to him that I was to give up the white man's lodge, and he will tell you that I am true Indian at heart."

The chief uttered an exclamation of surprise, and held up the bark, so that his followers could see it. A low murmur ran around, and Vilott could distinguish the muttered words:

"Red-coat chief—Serpent Tooth—Long Arm,"—and still other names, that proved how well the owner of the totem was known among the band of Shawnees.

Then turning to Vilott, the chief extended his hand, speaking in tones that testified how fully he believed the latter's story, and said.

"RED HEART is all Injun, Sleepy Eye tell um so. Mebl so Red Heart he come wid Shawnee to see Long Arm?"

"Yes, that is just what I want," promptly replied Vilott, and then the *cortege* reëntered the forest—the chief and his late prisoner walking together, conversing as friendly as though they were life-long acquaintances.

CHAPTER V.

THE "LEAPING PANTHER."

AH-ZAH, or, as it was rendered into English, "The Beaver," was aroused from his slumber, by the loud outcries of Seth Bender, when the latter discovered his son aiding the prisoner, Fletcher Vilott, to escape from the loft, and as if by instinct, comprehending the state of affairs, seized his weapons and rushed toward the cabin.

The guards were fully aroused, and in their confusion, rushed into the building, attempting to gain the loft, but owing to their eagerness, only hindering each other from raising the ladder that formed the means of communication. But the Beaver remained upon the outside, knowing that he could do no good within.

He bent his gaze upon the roof, as that was the only place where an escape could be effected, with his rifle half-poised in readiness for an instant shot. But owing to the intense gloom, he did not perceive the form of Vilott, until that worthy crouched for his desperate leap.

It was a snap shot, and, as we have seen, missed its mark by a hair's breadth. Without a moment's hesitation, the Chipewa sprung up the ladder, and pressing through the hole, duplicated the performance of Vilott. As he arose to his feet, he uttered the warning shout, and then bent his ear to listen for the sounds of his enemy's footsteps.

A slight, snapping sound guided him, and he swiftly glided to the spot, but the fugitive had vanished from the place, and he had nothing more to tell him of the man's movements or whereabouts. As he paused at the verge of the woods, he little dreamed how near he was to the man whom he had sworn to hunt to his death.

The whites, meanwhile, had not been idle, but procuring torches, had emerged from the fort and begun searching for the trail. The spot where Vilott had slipped was found, and then with lights, protected as much as possible from the driving wind and rain, the trail was lifted, step by step.

The Beaver joined them, thus unconsciously assisting his foe to escape the toils that were fast closing around him; but too impatient to wait the slow progress thus made, he soon left them, and glided rapidly away through the forest, pausing ever and anon to hearken for some signs of the fugitive, but without success.

Owing to his superior knowledge of the ground, and of night traveling, he very soon outstripped Vilott, reaching the creek some minutes before the other. Then pausing, he appeared to reflect for a moment, after which he followed the course of the stream downward, for nearly a mile.

Sheltering himself beneath the bending trunk of a huge tree, the savage prepared to carefully wipe out his dampened rifle and reload it; after which he crouched to the ground in an attitude of patient waiting, as though his mind was fully made up as to which course was the best for him to follow. And this was the case.

He well knew that Vilott would never dare to return to the settlement while the fearful charge still impended; and this fact determined, there was but one course he could pursue. And that was to make the best of his way to join his savage allies.

The Chippewa knew enough of Ezra Duff, with whom he had overheard Vilott plotting, to tell that the former belonged to the section of Shawnees under command of Sleepy Eye, and thought that to this village the fugitive would endeavor to make his way. An old feud existing between the Chippewa and the old Shawnee chief had made the former well acquainted with the *locale* of this town.

Then he reasoned that the warning whoop he had given would tell Vilott that a subtle foe was after him, a systematic attempt would be made to break the trail, and what so good for doing this as the swiftly-flowing creek with its hard, gravelly bottom? Thus it was that he had endeavored to head the fugitive.

As we know, this reasoning was partly if not entirely correct, but he had underrated the young man's resolution and powers of body. When Vilott swam down-stream he passed the unsuspecting Indian in safety, owing to the intense gloom and the silence he preserved in swimming.

The Beaver was intently listening, with his eyes bent upon the creek, but he did not observe the head of his foe as it swept past; and when the latter ascended the tree, scarcely a quarter of a mile separated them. At early dawn the savage arose and waded up-stream, closely scrutinizing the banks as he did so, feeling confident that Vilott had not passed below him.

He soon discovered the imprints of the fugitive's form upon the soft ground where he had rested, and noted that the footprints led into the water. For several hours he searched the banks for the trail, and finally was forced to believe that he had indeed allowed his prey to escape him in the night, and turned his face down with the current.

His chagrin may be imagined when he found the limb by which Vilott had ascended the tree, and learned how close to him the young man had spent the night, in security.

When Vilott left the stream, he had, he thought, effectually concealed his trail, but one footprint, just at the edge of the water, where he had slipped partially from a stone, had been overlooked by him. Not so the keen eyes of the Chippewa. As he slowly waded down-stream, the imprint was observed, and one glance convinced him that the clue was found.

Then the wild flash of vindictive joy that lit up his harsh features told how deeply he was interested in the search. That one track was all, but it was enough, and leaving the water, the Beaver struck out into the forest, making a *détour* and circling around so as to compass a considerable extent of ground; but still the trail was not found.

Nothing daunted, he again struck out, this time still deeper into the woods. A few moments, and then he paused with a low grunt of delight. There, just before him upon a bit of moist earth, as plainly defined as though imprinted for the purpose, were the footprints for which he had so long been searching.

Long and narrow, sharp at the toes, although evidently

incased in a moccasin, the Beaver could not possibly mistake it for other than the track of Fletcher Vilott, the man whom he had sworn to hunt to his death. He knew its counterpart was not to be found in the settlement.

A cursory glance was all that was necessary for him to keep the trail, and breaking into a rapid, steady run, the Beaver sped along through the woods. His eyes were roving in every direction, as it appeared, at the same time, as though he apprehended danger.

The heavy rifle he carried in one hand at a trail, and, as he glided noiselessly along, through the dense, shadowy woods, it appeared more like some weird phantom of the forest than a human being. But suddenly he paused and glared keenly before him, slightly bending his head.

A slight, crackling noise was heard, and then the form of a man broke through the bushes into the little glade. The encounter was so unexpected that the first impulse of each was to spring behind the protecting trunk of a tree, where they stood in breathless silence for some moments, neither daring to stir lest he should expose himself to the fire of his unknown foe.

The Beaver had seen enough in the lightning glance to know that the intruder was not he whom he was seeking, and could he have done so with safety, would have avoided a struggle for the sake of continuing his hunt, so great was his desire to meet with the outcast hunter. But now this was out of the question, and so he set his wits to work in hopes of devising some plan by which he could outwit the Shawnee, as he presumed his antagonist to be, as from the momentary glimpse he noted that he wore the war-paint, although dressed much as the generality of bordermen.

If a white man, he was probably one of the renegades who were so prevalent at that time and region.

By exercising great caution the Chippewa soon learned the exact position of his antagonist, and quickly withdrew his head as he caught a glimpse of a bright eye peering toward him over the top of a rifle-barrel. Then he reverted to the old device of exposing a portion of his dress, or else thrusting out an arm or leg, to be quickly withdrawn, in hope of thus drawing the fire of his foe.

But this would not answer, and Beaver saw that he had an old and wary wood-ranger to deal with—one that was “up to trap.” Then Ah-zah cast a keen glance behind him, after which he ventured to steal another peep at the tree behind which his enemy had ensconced himself.

A grim half-smile flickered about his thin lips as he noted the fluttering skirt of a hunting-shirt. Noiselessly sinking to the ground, the Chippewa commenced to worm his way backward from the tree, carefully keeping its thick trunk between him and the other.

It was a ticklish job, but he managed to gain the covert of a clump of bushes, and then crouching low down, he rapidly glided in a circuitous route so as to gain the rear of his enemy’s position. Once there, the matter would be easily ended.

When he knew that he must be far enough, the Beaver cautiously advanced, with rifle at full cock and half-poised, ready to administer the *coup de grace*. He could distinguish the upper portion of the tree-trunk, and already his eyes began to glisten as he thought how nicely he had outwitted the other, and that in a few moments more he would be flourishing the scalp of his troublesome customer.

Then he slowly rose up and stepped out from the tree, the deadly rifle already at his shoulder, and bearing full upon the somber-colored hunting-shirt. But the trigger was not touched and the rifle was quickly lowered from his cheek, while an exclamation of astonishment broke from his lips.

The hunting-shirt was there, but the body it usually enveloped was gone! A long-bladed hunting-knife was driven through the collar into the tree, thus holding it in place.

In his surprise the Beaver had remained out in open ground, but he was suddenly recalled to his senses by hearing the sound of a clear, mellow laugh ringing out from where he had first been concealed, and instantly sprung behind the tree beside which he was standing. The laugh ceased at his action, and the stranger called out, in a cheery tone:

“Come out, man; don’t hide from a fri’nd. Have you forgotten old times, Beaver, or have you turned Shawnee, Miami, or right down airnest?”

“Who debble you be, eh?” rejoined the Chippewa, still keeping behind his breastwork.

"Why, *me*, Simon Kenton, o' course! Don't you remember the time the two Wyandots had you treed?" At the same time the noted and already far-famed scout advanced boldly out into the open ground where the sunlight shone full upon his form and features.

"The 'Leaping Panther!'" exclaimed the savage, eagerly advancing and extending his hand.

"Well, yes, I've hearn that name before," laughed Kenton, cordially clasping the other's hand, "and I b'lieve the red-skins do sometimes call me that. Not that I think I've much o' the painter in me, but that's their way; an Injun'll be an Injun to the last, and they've got no more just idee of names than my stump-tailed cur dog has of Latin. Not that I mean you, at all, Beaver, for I don't look on you as one. You're mighty nigh a white man—two-thirds, anyhow."

"Wab! Chippewa he be all Injun—Injun all over!" quickly replied the Beaver.

"Yes, I know; but I mean that you've got good horse sense like a white, and I'd trust you a heap further'n a good many o' them with pale skins, too. But that don't matter now. Where was you bound for when I come up?"

Thereupon the Beaver succinctly narrated the discovered treachery of Fletcher Vilott, and the events that had occurred since.

"Whe-ew!" ejaculated Kenton, with a long-drawn breath, as the other concluded, "and he's one o' them that calls themselves white men! Blamed if I hain't a good mind to turn Injun!"

"Purty near be Injun, anyhow," said the Chippewa, holding up a small mirror before the scout's features.

"That's so, and I guess I may as well rub it off. I was playing red-skin last night, and had to leave in such a hurry that I forgot all about it. But, say, how is it at the settlement? Are they awake, or do they sleep in the daytime?" added Kenton, a little anxiously, as he strode along by the side of the Beaver.

"'Um keep eye open *all* time. Beaver he tell 'um Injan Shawnee dey on war-path."

"Then if so be you wish it, I'll go along with you for a spell, 'cause that was nigh all my business in these parts. I'd

like to get a squint at that renegade fellow you're a'ter, anyhow."

"Good—heap good!" grunted the savage, in a gratified tone. "We git 'um now, fo' sure! Leaping Panther he show Beaver how to be cunning, all same like 'possum."

"I don't know, Beaver," said Kenton, shaking his head thoughtfully, "I'm a little dub'ous about that. Mayhap 'tis me that'll have to take lessons from *you*. They say you are something beyond the common in that line, and what I've see'd you do, don't in nowise go ag'in' it."

The Indian did not reply, but there was a pleased expression that flashed momentarily athwart his rigid features, that told how highly he valued the praise bestowed by Kenton. They followed the trail for some time in perfect silence, when the Beaver remarked:

"The Leaping Panther had to run from bad Injuns den, eh?"

"Yes, I guess we may call it running, for I *did* make my legs pass each other rather lively for a spell, and I don't shame to say so, for old Sleepy Eye and some twenty or more of his pet imps was a'ter me hot-foot, wild for hair."

"Sleepy Eye?" eagerly asked the savage.

"Yes; do you know him?"

"Him dog—dog—dog!" bitterly hissed the Beaver. "Chippewa he take 'um scalp purty soon, by-m'-by. Hunt him fo' long—heap long time. When find 'um, den one *mus* die!" and the right hand instinctively sought the knife-haft, while his black eyes glowed with an almost demoniacal fury.

"And I wouldn't care to stand in his moccasins, if you're always so hot about it as you are now," said Kenton, lightly

"But say, Beaver, we may meet this feller afore you wish it. We're almost following my back trail."

"How many you call 'um, den?"

"Somewhere nigh twenty, I reckon. There war two more when we left the village, but they stopped along the trail."

"Leaping Panther him got 'um scalp?" queried the Beaver, who was not at a loss to read the scout's meaning.

"No. I was in too much of a hurry, even if it was in my natur' to strike a dead inimy; the which it ain't, however. No, Beaver, them tricks may be all right and well enough for

an Injun, being as that was the way they war l'arnt and I might say, in their gospel. But a white man is, or leastwise should be, dif'rent, although there is many who say, 'An eye for an eye; and a tooth for a tooth,' and argies that whatever the reds do, they mustn't complain if they're sarved the same.

"Now there is Lew Wetzel—you know him, Beaver; the 'White Devil,' as he's called—and his brother would resk their lives any day for the sake of lifting a scalp. They're good fellers in scrimmages—none better—but their lifting hair don't improve 'em a mite. Bat, 's—st!" and the two scouts suddenly paused in an attitude of intense attention.

The sound that had startled them was the report of a gun; and one not very far distant. Then came a series of wild yells.

"Some diviltry going on out there, Beaver," muttered Kenton, after a few moments; "and whoever it is, they are leaving us behind in a considerable of a hurry. Shall we strike out? may be it's our bird run ag'inst some red-skins."

"Good!" uttered the Chippewa, "we see who 'um be, by-'m-by."

Still keeping along the trail left by Vilott, the two scouts sped along at a rapid gait for several minutes; then they reached the bank of a small creek.

"See, Beaver, it is him they're a'ter!" exclaimed Kenton, pointing downward at the trail.

They now increased their speed, for the three rascals had left a broad spoor behind them. When the edge of the open tract was reached, the Beaver paused with a significant grunt, and pointed to the opposite side.

No words were spoken, for none were needed. The group of Indians were gathered around the form of a white man, it is true, but who did not appear to be under restraint. The scouts kept well concealed and watched the movements of their foes with deep curiosity. Then the party turned and disappeared in the forest.

"Well, Beaver," said Kenton, thoughtfully, "it is plain that the young man *was* a traitor, and one meaner'n pussley, too; but I wouldn't 'a' believed it unless I'd see'd it with my own eyes; he always looked so free and open like. But he was

no pris'ner when they left just now; that much is clear as mud."

Then he added, after a few moments' pause:

"Well, which is it—go ahead or go back?"

"Beaver mus' hab scalp 'fore go back."

"That settles it, then! But it won't do to cross here, for there's no telling how many o' the red imps have got their eyes fixed over this way, ready to pick off any person who might be a-following."

"Beaver knows how git over," replied that worthy, leading the way just within the edge of the forest, for a few hundred yards, and then as he paused, pointed to a spot that looked much like the entrance to a ground-hog's den, only upon a larger scale.

"This is something new to me!" muttered Kenton, as he followed the lead of the Beaver, and passing in at the hole, found that it led into a shallow ditch or trench, running across the open tract, but being so well screened and covered with dried weeds and grass that it bore the appearance of an artificial tunnel, instead of nature's handiwork. By crouching low down, their bodies were entirely concealed from the view of any person who might chance to be upon the level ground.

CHAPTER VI.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

HE of the many names, Joe Curd—Fletcher Vilott—Red Heart—kept pace with the Shawnee chief, Sleepy Eye, followed in single file by the remainder of the band; thus strung out resembling a gigantic joint-snake as they moved through the woods.

"Red Heart leave 'um plenty trail behind 'um?" queried Sleepy Eye.

"Well, I did break it for a ways, but if the Beaver is after me, he will scent it out. I only did it to delay him until I

should get a good start toward my brother, the Shawnee," replied Vilott.

"You t'ink mebbe so 'um come 'long, by'm-by? Beaver?"

"Yes. He is too smart to be thrown off without more precaution than I used. I expect he is not very far behind now. Why?"

"Sleepy Eye hate 'um Beaver, heap—big heap," answered the chief, his hand playing mechanically with his scalping knife. "Tell braves cotch 'um; den make fire—burn—hollet like de debble!"

"You mean to take him prisoner then, and not kill him?" queried Vilott, a little anxiously.

"Yeh. Tek 'um pris'ner fust, *den* kill," and then turning around, Sleepy Eye spoke in a low tone to one of his followers, evidently a sub-chief, who then halted, along with three-fourths of the braves.

It was long after nightfall when the party finally reached the temporary village of the chief, Sleepy Eye, and Fletcher Vilott—as we will continue to call him—upon being shown a pile of robes in one corner of the chief's lodge, cast himself upon it, stretching his weary, aching limbs with a feeling of such delicious repose that almost made him forget hunger and thirst; and almost ere his features had relaxed from the extensive yawn, a gradually increasing rumbling gave evidence that he was asleep.

The sun was high in the heavens when he awoke, feeling greatly refreshed and with a most voracious appetite. The noise he made in arising attracted the attention of a middle-aged woman who was smoking a pipe in the opposite corner, and going to the door—or rather the extensive flap that answered the purpose—she uttered a peculiar cry that soon brought the chief to the lodge.

"Ugh! Red Heart much plenty big sleep!"

"Well, yes," yawned Vilott, "I believe I did, and if you've no particular objections, I'll make a big eat, too. I'm awful hungry!"

"Better you no' see 'um w'ite chief—what you call—Ku'nel Nunan?"

"Not until after breakfast," replied Vilott, decidedly. "It is not good to talk on an empty stomach. He can wait."

Sleepy Eye stared at the young man as if in amazement at his audacity, for a moment, then turned and gave a few orders to the squaw, who immediately began to prepare some food.

"Where is the water, chief? I wish to wash," added Vilott; and this request appeared to add still further to the wonder of his host, who, nevertheless, pointed to a broad deep creek that flowed through the edge of the village.

Vilott emerged from the lodge, and accompanied by the chief, soon reached the stream. Suddenly Sleepy Eye whispered in a low tone:

"Look—see 'um white chief—Serpent Tongue!"

A tall, portly man, dressed in the uniform of a British colonel, was approaching them, and from his dignified step—it might almost be called *strut*—one would casually deem him a conceited, self-sufficient fool. But they who did so, would be greatly deceived.

His florid, rather handsome visage, did not betray it, but there was a wondrous amount of cunning and determined courage concealed beneath that expressionless mask. Brave to a fault, well educated and a keen judge of human nature, he possessed an influence and ascendancy over the Indian allies of Britain, surpassed by no one man; and he made good—or bad—use of this gift.

He drew near to where Vilott was still coolly bathing, and with a nod to the obsequious chief, fixed a slightly perplexed gaze upon the young man. Then as the latter rose erect, the officer addressed him in a low, smooth, oily voice, that betrayed as little as did his features.

"You are Mr.—ah—Joseph Curd?"

"So they cal. me," coolly replied Vilott as he wiped his face. "And you—?"

"Colonel Nunan—ah—at your service," responded the other, with a faint accent of surprise. "Then you are the person with whom I have—ah—had some slight correspondence?"

"I believe so, but excuse me if I ask you to postpone this business until after I have breakfasted. I have eaten nothing for over two days, and as you see, am not in a condition to enter into explanations that will probably consume a good deal of time," coolly returned the young man.

"Ah—um—yes, yes! I will call again in an hour."

"I will be ready, then," and Vilott proceeded at a deliberate pace to the lodge, followed doubtfully by the amazed chief, who evidently found it difficult to comprehend how any person could be audacious enough to treat the dreaded white chief so cavalierly.

While Vilott was still eating, the officer entered the tent, followed by a grim-looking warrior, who closely eyed the young man after taking a seat in the background. This scrutiny was not unnoticed, but Vilott dispatched his food and then lighted his pipe before paying any attention to his visitors.

"Mr—ah—Curd," spoke Nunan slowly; then adding in a quick, sharp tone—"That is your name, is it not?"

"Why should you doubt it, sir? I believe I told you it was, not long since."

"Excuse me if I offend, but really you do not appear to realize your position here, nor to whom you speak. Do you know that I have but to lift my finger and pronounce your doom, to have it instantly put into execution?" softly murmured the officer.

"And excuse me, sir, if I am mistaken in you; I have heard that you were an officer and a gentleman," pointedly returned Vilott.

"Well?"

"I have ventured here upon business of yours—"

"For which you are to be amply paid."

"Just so: for which I am to be amply paid; but the reward did not include threats and insults. You doubt my word and then get angry if I resent it. If you treat me as one gentleman should treat another, well and good; if not, then we will cry quits, and you will have the trouble of seeking another agent."

"If you are acting upon the square, you have nothing to dread—"

"Dread?"

"Pardon," bowed Nunan, "I should have said, nothing to expect but honorable treatment; but I am informed that you are not the person you pretend to be, but a *spy*."

"A spy!—and who *dares*!" exclaimed Vilott, rising to his feet, and half unsheathing his long-bladed knife.

"Ahrapoo," gently interrupted the agent.

At this signal, the grim-looking savage who had entered with Nunan, arose and advanced a step.

"Ahrapoo, is this the man you met at the Cross Oak?" added the agent.

"No!"

"Well, Mr.—ah—Curd," resumed the colonel, "what do you say to this?"

"Go on; I am listening," briefly responded the young man.

"Well, I received a communication from a person who signed himself Joseph Curd, offering to—to do a certain thing for a certain reward—"

"Exactly: to deliver into your power the fort or settlement of Graingerville, for the consideration of two hundred pounds in gold, and a commission as captain in the regular army, with full pay dating from the first of the year," added Vilott, promptly.

"Correct. I sent a messenger—this man—to meet him and give him my answer. This he did; but now he says that he does not recognize you as the person whom he met."

"Would he, if I wore a suit of buck-skin, a wig of short, curly red hair, and with the addition of a few freckles upon my face?" half sneered the young man.

"What does Ahrapoo say?" asked the agent, turning to the savage.

"Red scalp, face spotted like um rattlesnake, eyes like um sky," briefly responded that worthy.

"Bah! the eyes of the Shawnee were under a cloud; he did not see straight," sneered Vilott.

"Pale-face he *lie* like de debble!" angrily cried the savage.

"Look here, my red-skinned beauty," firmly said Vilott, advancing a step, "if you value a whole skin, just keep a more civil tongue in your head; because if you speak like that again, blessed if I don't give you a mouthful of loose teeth to digest."

The form of Ahrapoo crouched like a panther preparing to spring, and he half drew his tomahawk, when Nunan stepped between the belligerents, and in a sharp, decisive tone commanded:

"Stand back, Ahrapoo; and you, young sir, be a little more chary of your threats. They are not relished here, nor are they often brooked."

"I shall not begin any dispute, nor, for that matter, shall I shrink from one. If I am treated rightly, no person shall have cause to complain of my actions. But if you know a man called Ezra Duff, be so kind as to call him, and mayhap he may be able to settle this dispute."

"You are right;" and Nunan spoke a few words to the Indian, who sullenly left the lodge. "I hope you are true, but remember, that if I find the contrary, you will never live to boast of it," admonished the officer.

"And it may be as well for you to reserve your threats until then. Remember that you have not yet obtained possession of the fort," significantly returned Vilott.

The agent did not answer, and they stood in silence until interrupted by the entrance of Ezra Duff, who saluted Nunan with an air of wholesome awe. But a genial smile lighted up his rugged visage as he recognized the young man, who advanced and cordially grasped the borderer's horny hand.

"Duff, my friend, this gentleman is kind enough to doubt my being the one who met you at the Cross Oak. What have you to say about it?"

"Speak out, man," added Nunan, as the borderer glanced toward him.

"Wal, then, ef so be you want to know the truth, why this 'ere gentleman *did* meet me thar, an' gi'e me the letter as I handed your honor, arter gi'ein' the right signals an' showin' me your totem. 'Ca'se why, I know him 'ca'se he beat me out an' out in a hand squose, which is my—"

"That will do. Look again and see if there is no doubt. Did he have blue eyes or brown?"

"Bless me," wonderingly exclaimed the borderer, "has he got two pa'r on 'em? I kin sw'ar to them 'uns, anyhow!"

"Well, sir," said Vilott, with a half-smile, "are you satisfied?"

"I am. If you say you really did meet Ahrapoo, in disguise, why I must believe that you are Joseph Curd."

"Well, then, I did meet him, but how he came to mistake my eyes for blue, I can not comprehend."

"Enough, then. Duff, you may go."

The borderer made his exit with another affectionate glance at "the boss," as he termed Vilott, who had completely taken captive his rough, untutored heart.

"And now, Mr. Curd, I will hear your report, and why I am favored with this visit, for I presume it to be made to me."

Thereupon Vilott succinctly detailed the interruption he and Duff had been subjected to at their interview, with what had subsequently occurred at the settlement and his escape.

"Then that plan falls through!" impatiently exclaimed Nunan, his real spirit showing for a moment, but then the impenetrable mask was once more assumed, and he became the old sleek, half-stupid looking personage whom Vilott had first beheld.

"No, sir, I think not. It must be postponed for awhile, but I trust *only* postponed. We must allow sufficient time to elapse for the settlers to get calmed down, and matters to resume their old course. Then I think we can still carry out your plan."

"How so?" queried the agent, with an interested air.

"Well, I am a fair hand at playing a part, and assuming a disguise, as the choleric gentleman of color, who so kindly wished to relieve me of my superfluous hair, can testify. Now strangers often stop at the settlement and stop for days at a time. And upon this fact my plan is based.

"Ezra Duff is not known to the settlers; besides, he, too, can be disguised, as I will be, and then two travelers, hunters or what not, will call at the fort, obtain admission, and then upon the night we will select beforehand, these worthies will open the gates, invite yourself and friends to enter, and—the remainder rests with you."

"Good!" exclaimed Nunan; "I see that you will do—"

"Almost as well as Mr. Joseph Curd, eh?" laughingly interrupted Vilott.

"That reminds me—I owe you a thousand apologies for doubting your word and identity, but the fact is Ahrapoo was so positive that you were a spy, and I have ever found him so acute, that I did suspect you. But that is past, now."

"Say no more; I am content."

"But I must warn you to be upon your guard about this Indian. He is very vindictive, and doubtless imagines you have insulted him. I scarcely think he will break my order, though he may."

"Thank you for the hint. I am not fond of quarrels, but if Mr. Ahrapoo puts himself in my way, and acts *too* officiously, he may get worse than I promised him. Although I should hate to shed blood here, among his friends, I will not hesitate if it becomes necessary," replied Vilott, determinedly.

"If it should come to that, you may rely upon my protection, but even then it would be a desperate risk for you. My influence is great, but Ahrapoo is a popular man, among the young hot-bloods especially, and the result might be uncertain. Far better to put up with a little, than to run the risk."

"Very well. And now, Colonel Nunan, I do not wish to be considered impertinent or unduly curious, but upon my part I have been open and candid. May I ask what is your reason for being so anxious to possess Graingerville?"

Nunan meditated for a brief spell, closely scrutinizing Vilott before replying.

"Well, I had better, perhaps, be open with you, as it may be essential for you to know my full motives. What I desire above all, is the possession of a certain lady, at present in the settlement. Of course, the taking of the place would increase my popularity with the Indians greatly, and be the means of completing the fortune I am accumulating in the business here, for, of course that is my main object, although here as an agent for Great Britain."

"And this lady is called—?" queried Vilott, a little anxiously.

"Katie Grainger, the daughter of the head man there. I have met her several times—in fact was a suitor of hers at Philadelphia—but she had the ill taste to 'respectfully decline the honor' of my hand. But I have sworn she shall be mine, despite all," and there was a tinge of bitterness in the low, soft tones. "But do you know her?"

"I have seen her," coldly returned Vilott.

"Then you understand me fully. The attack must be made while she is there, and as I, of course, must not appear in it,

personally, I intrust the charge of her to you. Rest assured that if you are successful, you will never have cause to regret it."

"Very well, then; I accept the commission."

After some little more conversation, in a desultory way, the colonel proposed a stroll, and this being just what Vilott was anxious for, for reasons of his own, the two men emerged from the lodge and strolled along together, arm in arm.

"It is politic, you see," laughed Nunan, "to let the Indians see that we are upon intimate terms, and will be a great protection to you. These poor fools look upon me with much the same feeling as we do at home upon good King George—God bless him! And few, if any, will dare cast a black look upon you after to-day."

"I am much obliged to you for your thoughtful consideration," replied Vilott. "I should not like, particularly, to have any disturbance just at present with my *red brethren*."

"Oh, I am selfish in doing so," smiled the officer. "I must take good care of you, as you are the only one I can depend upon, to gain for me the fair damsel of whom we were just speaking."

"Look!" exclaimed Vilott, excitedly, "who is that? surely she is no Indian!"

"Ah, ha! my ruse works finely! It was with the intention of seeing her that I asked you to walk this way. And can you guess why?"

"It must be—she is white—and—" muttered Vilott, apparently greatly excited.

"Better still! you fall in love with her at first sight, and require no hints from me."

"But *who* is she?" persisted the young man.

"Well, as to that, I can not state, with any degree of certainty. She is a blank—a puzzle, to none more than herself. As you can see, she is of white parentage, and that is all I can say as to her birth. She has been brought up as a daughter of the Shawnees from a child, an infant I believe. A memento, probably, of some massacre.

"The chief that you came in with—Sleepy Eye—claims to be her father, but her face gives the lie to that; there is no mixed blood in those veins. He is very jealous of her, can

hardly bear her out of his sight, and I would not envy the one who would attempt to do her a harm."

"From a child, you say? and yet she looks refined and ladylike!" mused Vilott.

"She is so, and is very well educated, too. Sleepy Eye had a white wife, one of his captives, who raised the "White Fawn," as she is commonly termed, and regularly educated her, until I verily believe that she would put to the blush many of our fine ladies in the cities," warmly replied Colonel Nunan.

"Does she speak English?"

"Like yourself. So you see that is one obstacle the less, and if I may judge from the earnest manner in which her pretty dark eyes are following your form, you will not have any very serious difficulty in making her acquaintance. But take my advice and make friends with the old chief; I will put in a word there for you, myself."

"For what?"

"Why, as you can see for yourself, the wench is pretty enough to suit the most fastidious, and if you contemplate doing any thing among the red-skins you must take a wife; and who better than the daughter of a great chief? That is what I mean, and, believe me, you would do well to think seriously of it."

"I *will* think of it," at length exclaimed Vilott, determinedly, as though he had fully made up his mind to something.

The person, the sight of whom had called forth all these comments, was, in truth, a somewhat remarkable object to be seen with such surroundings.

It was a young maiden, just budding into womanhood, of a slight but lithe and graceful form. She was dressed in a style, combining both the savage and civilized, that became her well. She was a brunette, with glossy black hair wound in heavy braids around her small, daintily-poised head. Her eyes were large and dreamy-looking, but now were filled with an expression of lively curiosity as they dwelt upon the tall, handsome form of Fletcher Vilott. Her features were delicate and regular; so that, all in all, it was no wonder that the young man was struck with her appearance.

She was standing just without a large canvas tent, and as the two men again resumed their walk, the door-flap was suddenly pushed aside and the Herculean form of Sleepy Eye emerged. He hesitated as he noted the colonel and his companion, and muttered a few words to the girl, who immediately entered the tent, while the chief advanced to join Nunan and his guest.

CHAPTER VII.

A DANGEROUS TRAIL.

"How did you smell out this place, Beaver?" asked Kenton, after a moment's silence. "You must have stumbled into it, for better kiver never was made than this same gopher-hole."

"Injun *did* tumble in—not Beaver dough, nudder Injun, Shawnee. Show you 'um by'm-by," replied the Chippewa, with a grim smile. "One time Beaver he out on scout, an' see two Injun. Shoot one *quick*; den odder Injun he shoot, too, but don't shoot fast 'nough, an' jes' hit tree. Den *he* run, an' Beaver *he* run too, so fast, fo' long time. Den odder Injun he tumble down quick in long hole an' den jes' as he poke 'um head up, Beaver tom'hawk 'um. So Chippewa he git two scalps an' fin' long hole, too."

"'S—st!" hissed Kenton, suddenly pausing. His keen ear had caught the faint, far-away sound of rapidly-beating hoofs, and as they listened it became plain that whoever the horsemen were, they were swiftly approaching the ditch.

The top of this, the tunnel not being over a yard wide, was thickly overgrown with grasses and dried weeds, matted together so as to almost exclude the light, although the interior of the ditch was comparatively open. Hence, from the level ground its existence would not be suspected, unless as stated, one should stumble into it.

The horsemen appeared to be making directly for the point where the two scouts were crouching, and they hugged that

side as closely as the nature of the ground would admit, fearing to either advance or retreat, lest the movement should be seen. A half-dozen seconds of intense suspense followed, for should one of the horses break into the hidden ditch, it would be at the risk of the life and limbs of both parties. Then with a rush the horsemen safely passed the covert, only one of them slightly caving in the bank, scattering the dirt over the recumbent scouts.

Kenton immediately arose and peered through the interstices in the weeds, and ejaculated:

"Injuns; but that's all I can see. A close shave, Beaver!"

"Yeh. We go on now."

After a few yards more were traversed, they passed a moldering skeleton, to which the Chippewa nodded significantly. It was that of him who had revealed the secret passage.

The forest was at length reached and the ditch gradually ran out. After a keen survey of the level plot, the scouts pursued their way through the wood.

"Wait a minute, Beaver," at length said Kenton; "and let's see what we're going to do. I have no particular desire to enter old Sleepy Eye's town a pris'ner, and I don't suppose you have. You say that this young feller—what's his name?—knows that you're a'ter him?"

"Beaver gib 'um yell."

"I'll be bound you did, and that helped to carry out what I said not long since; that you're more'n half white now, by natur'. A out and out Injun wouldn't 'a' done that. But, hows'ever, if he knows you are on the trail, it stands to reason that he'll tell old Sleepy Eye, and that venerable old rip has too great a hankering a'ter your hair, not to set a ambush. D'y' see?"

"The Leaping Panther knows all. Den what do?"

"Well, what we want, is the young feller—"

"An' Sleepy Eye's scalp—'um want, heap!"

"Yes, just so. But where'll we be most apt to find 'em? Why at the village, and that's the p'int we must aim for, and let the trail go."

"Good i den Shawnee dogs dey wait all day, wait all night; den 'um go home mad like de debble!" grinned the Chippewa.

"Pity you wasn't educated when you was young, Beaver, I b'lieve you'd 'a' made one of them writer folks, you have sech an eye for the funny p'int. But let's jog on."

The two, with Kenton in the lead, glided rapidly and noiselessly along in a course almost parallel to that previously pursued by the Shawnees, trusting thus to escape any plot or ambush that might have been formed against a pursuing party, if such should chance along.

They kept silence now, and acted with all possible precautions, for they fully realized the desperate nature of the undertaking they were engaged upon; now rendered doubly so, both from the fact of Kenton's recent escapade, and the arrival of the young man who knew the Chippewa to be upon his trail. Their eyes roved restlessly and keenly in every direction, while their rifles were carried in a position ready for instant use.

An hour or more had elapsed since leaving the hidden passage, when suddenly the Beaver uttered a low hiss and crouched to the ground; an example that was imitated by his companion. But the precaution availed them nothing, for a series of loud, exultant yells rung forth, telling but too plainly that they were discovered.

"We must run for it! Draw their fire and then put!" muttered Kenton, springing up and darting behind the trunk of a huge tree.

The ruse succeeded, for, as the dusky figures broke cover, a quick volley of firearms greeted them; but owing to the celerity with which the movement was executed, a crease upon the Beaver's shoulder was the only casualty.

"Give them blazes!" yelled Kenton, and as their rifles were discharged into the crowd of approaching savages, a loud cry of mortal agony told that the missiles had sped well.

Then, as the remainder faltered a moment, the two scouts turned and fled at full speed through the forest. The trees were thick, but there was little undergrowth, and to their necessarily erratic course they probably owed their lives, for the interposing branches of the trees stopped the arrows and other missiles hurled after them.

Then it became a race for life and death, and the result a mere question of speed and endurance. In neither of these

traits were the scouts wanting; indeed, they were justly celebrated, as many a defeated competitor could testify.

The scouts both knew the lay of the ground well, and for what point they were aiming, and were not likely to throw away any chance, or allow their pursuers to turn them. And but for one thing there is little doubt but what they would have eluded the foe without any particular difficulty.

The Shawnees in pursuit kept up a loud outcry, as if for the purpose of still further intimidating the fugitives, but it was speedily apparent that a deeper motive lay beneath it than this. Just as the two scouts crossed a little glade, another party of savages broke out at the opposite extremity, and entered upon the chase.

These, although bearing firearms, did not attempt their use, or the chase would have been ended then and there, in all human probability, for scarce two score yards intervened between them and the fugitives.

"Divide, Beaver; it's our only show!" cried Kenton, diverging slightly to the left.

The Chippewa obeyed this hint, and with renewed speed he tore through the forest, the new-comers following hotly upon his foot-tracks. His pace had been so fast that he had had no chance to reload his rifle, although he still retained it in his grasp.

He marveled greatly that his pursuers did not resort to their firearms to put a period to the chase, but they were the band detailed by Sleepy Eye to watch for him, and had orders to *capture* the Chippewa, and upon no account to kill him. Hearing the shouts of the Shawnees, they had left their covert and endeavored to intercept the fugitives, but were a moment too late, as we have seen.

Onward they speed, the pursuers and pursued, but the fearful pace is beginning to tell upon even the frame of the Beaver. Still he rushed forward, panting, but with a stern, settled look of determination resting upon his bronzed features as he strained every nerve to effect his escape. He knows the reason now, that no more missiles are aimed at his life, for he understands the cries of the pursuing Shawnees, and he resolves that they shall never carry him back alive to the village of his hated rival.

For an instant he glances over his shoulder, but it proves

fatal to his hopes of freedom, for his foot catches against a protuberance and he falls heavily to the ground. The wild, exultant yells that his foes utter, are echoed back by a cry of defiance, and even as they are upon him he dashes them aside with a resistless sweep of the heavy rifle-barrel, and leaping to a huge tree, he places its trunk for a shield to his back, and with clubbed rifle, awaits their onset in stern silence.

The next moment they are upon him, and now begins a fearful struggle; the Shawnees endeavoring to capture him alive, and he, resolved to make the victory a dear one, plies the heavy rifle with terrible effect. The stock breaks in his hand, yet he does not falter, but with keen knife and deadly tomahawk, deals death or gaping wounds at every stroke.

But despite his fearful efforts, they are pressing him closer and harder. A fallen savage grasps him by the leg and endeavors to trip him up. One deadly, downright thrust of the knife relieves him of this foe; but then the others swarm upon him and bear him to the ground by sheer force of numbers.

Then the writhing, struggling mass gradually separates, and the Beaver is lifted to his feet, firmly bound, faint and breathless from his terrible exertions. But an exultant gleam of triumph passes over his features as he looks around him upon the dead and wounded—grim evidence of his prowess.

Truly it was a dear victory!

Then the party slowly took up its way toward the village, a ghastly-looking procession. Only the strict orders of their dreaded chief prevented the Chippewa from being sacrificed then and there.

Kenton's change of course brought his pursuers nearly one-third nearer, and the arrows began to once more hurtle around his person. He had strong hopes of escape, trusting to baffle his pursuers until the shades of night set in, as the sun was now near the horizon, and his only fear was that a stray missile might strike him.

He had a plan mapped out by which he hoped to elude them, and his turning to the left was a part of it. If he could reach the edge of the open tract in advance of his pursuers, he thought that he could enter the secret passage in such a manner that his covert would not be suspected, as by that

time the sun would have set and the trail difficult to distinguish.

Once within that he could leave it for the tall grass and weeds, and then gain a sufficient start to distance the Shawnees. But now a new obstacle presents itself.

A wild, triumphant yell breaks from the pursuers as Kenton leaped over the prostrate trunk of a tree, for there, not a score of yards distant, directly in front of the fugitive, spring up the forms of two warriors, who brandish their ready weapons.

Not a moment does he hesitate, but, drawing his knife, Kenton dashes aside the blows aimed at him by his new adversaries, and plunges the keen blade to the hilt in the heart of the foremost savage, who, with a death-yell, drops lifeless to the ground.

At the same moment the scout felt the knife of the second Indian enter his side, and, stung with rage at the pain, he turned upon him, and with the speed of thought, dashed his clenched fist full in the face of the unfortunate savage, whose features were flattened by the force of the terrible blow that hurled him to the ground like a shot.

Not a dozen seconds elapsed from the appearance of the two Indians until it was all over, but when Kenton again resumed his flight the foremost of his pursuers was scarcely as many yards distant. But he sped on with unabated velocity, although it seemed as if fortune was against him, and he began to have doubts as to how it was all going to end.

Abruptly turning a dense point of underbrush, Kenton dropped flat upon his face in the deep shadow, close beneath the bushes. The yelling savages also turned, and then dashed ahead, deeming the fugitive had still continued his flight.

When he thought they were all past, the scout arose and fled swiftly in the opposite direction, the one that he knew would lead him to the hidden ditch. But his steps were heard, and with yells of rage at their being outwitted, the Shawnees turned upon their footsteps, and the chase once more resumed its old aspect.

However, Kenton had gained fully a hundred yards by the maneuver, and that was priceless. Only at intervals could the savages obtain glimpses of his form, owing to the inter-

vening trees and the fast-gathering gloom, and they gradually spread out upon either hand, so as to avoid being again doubled upon.

But Kenton had no such intention just then. He knew he was near the desired covert, and trusted that his vantage would enable him to carry out his plans already conceived. With this intention he exerted to the utmost his every muscle, and never before had it seemed to him with such good results.

He had diverged to the left, so that he was now near the verge of the timber bordering the open tract, and as his trained eye recognized the landmarks, he quickly left the forest and dove hurriedly into the tunnel. For some moments he glided rapidly along upon his belly, until, from the chorus of yells that sounded from his pursuers, Kenton knew that they had lost sight of him, and evidently suspecting that he had again tried the dodge that had succeeded before, were beating around to discover his whereabouts.

The next few seconds were fraught with painful suspense, for if any one of his enemies knew of the concealed tunnel, his race was well-nigh run; for the pain of his wound and loss of blood, added to his fatigue, had nearly overpowered him.

But as the moments passed on without the dreaded discovery being made, although he could still hear the yells, and the trampling of many feet, his hopes revived, and he began gradually and cautiously working his way along the weed-screened ditch. The progress was necessarily slow, for Kenton could hear the savages beating about in close vicinity upon the plain, and as eyesight could avail him nothing, he feared snapping a weed, or otherwise betraying his place of refuge.

Suddenly Kenton paused with a shudder of horror. A peculiar, shrill rattle sounded in his ears, but just from what point he could not determine; until, glaring ahead, he distinguished two tiny points of light, and knew that he was face to face with that most dreaded of reptiles, *a rattlesnake*.

For a moment he was upon the point of springing from his place of concealment, preferring to trust to escaping from the savages than remain cooped up with such a fearful companion; for like the generality of the human race, Kenton possessed

an intense dread of snakes. But then as the eyes still remained motionless while the rattle continued, the scout drew his knife and held it cautiously before him as he strained every nerve for a spring, if necessary.

For a second he held the weapon poised, and then, stilling his breath, Kenton cast it with a steady aim at the twin rays of light. As the knife left his hand, the scout made a rapid retrograde movement, fortunately in silence, and then listened intently.

He could hear a slight writhing noise, while the rattle was rapid and irregular; then this died away, and he murmured a heartfelt thanksgiving at his almost miraculous escape from the most horrible of deaths, for he knew that his knife had performed its work well.

The scout was puzzled, and undecided in which way to turn. He could still hear the tramping feet and various signals of his foes, telling that they had not yet abandoned the idea of his being concealed somewhere near at hand, owing to his sudden disappearance.

To remain where he was involved a double danger—that of being unearthed by some unlucky stumble of his pursuers, or of meeting with another of the loathsome reptiles, from which he might not escape so fortunately. To go forward, he ran the risk of piercing some portion of his person with the poison-laden fangs of the dead rattlesnake; to go backward would be advancing into the very midst of his enemies, the Shawnees.

Of all these evils, Kenton chose to “go ahead,” and trust to his usual good-fortune to escape the evil dreaded.

Carefully raking the ground before him with his rifle, Kenton managed to push the body of the reptile to one side, and found that his knife was free. This he gladly secured, and then, slowly and cautiously, he crawled along the hidden path. But he was destined to be fortune’s sport yet a little longer, as a startling incident occurring at this juncture plainly evidenced.

A sudden noise startled Kenton, and he paused, half-crouching, much in the attitude necessary to play “leap-frog.” It was the rustling tread of a man on the half-dried fog that covered the level surface.

Nearer and nearer it approached, slowly and deliberately, as it appeared to the impatient scout, and then, with a rustling, cracking noise the new-comer stepped into the hidden ditch, and brought up unexpectedly upon Kenton's shoulders !

The latter uttered a muffled curse, the former a wondering grunt, as the scout ducked his head, thus shooting the savage head-foremost, with considerable force, into the weed-covered tunnel. The white man drew his knife and was about to leap after his enemy, when he noted that through the space opened by the red-skin's unexpected tumble, the rays of the full moon shone down clear and distinct, and that his enemy would have him at great disadvantage in passing this point.

So he awaited until he heard the Shawnee stir ; then began uttering a series of grunts that would have made a genuine porker's eyes open wide with astonishment at thus finding himself excelled. Luckily for the success of the scout's ruse, his antagonist was a bit of an epicure, in a small way, and had a natural hankering after "hog-meat and hominy."

With the intention of securing to himself the tid-bit thus unexpectedly thrown in his way, he did not signal his comrades, but advanced cautiously to the assault, his mouth watering with anticipation. But his hopes were destined never to be realized, for as he entered the lighted spot, a long arm, clutching a glittering bit of steel at the end of it, shot out from the gloom, and the savage fell back, stricken to the heart.

Although death claimed him, yet he had breath enough to peal forth a wild, quavering death-yell, that after a moment's pause was caught up and reëchoed with cries of bitter rage and fury, by the Shawnees at being thus outwitted.

Kenton knew that further concealment would be impossible, as they would soon unearth him, and leaping from the ditch he sped forward across the level stretch, with strength and speed restored by his resting-spell. Once more it was to be a race for life and death, as the Shawnees caught sight of his form in the bright moonlight and swarmed forward, making the welkin ring with their mad shouts and yells.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WHITE FAWN.

"Ah, chief," blandly observed Nunan, extending his hand, but with a certain air of *hauteur* that told he was fully aware of the condescension thus shown—speaking in the Shawnee dialect, "you are just the person I most wished to see. You can do me a favor, if you will."

"The Soft Voice has but to speak," returned the chief, "and Sleepy Eye will do as he bids."

"I thought so, and I am glad to find that I was not mistaken in you. It will be for your own profit, too, if you do this. You have seen my young brother here. He came to you, tired, hungry and unarmed; but that was not his fault. The long-knives at the big lodge captured him and took away all the red cloth, the guns and bright knives, and fine presents that he was bringing to give to the braves of my brother."

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, his little dull eyes twinkling avariciously as he turned to glance at Fletcher Vilott, who was standing with his gaze fixed upon the lodge that contained the mysterious maiden in whom he felt so deep an interest, totally oblivious of his surroundings.

"Yes, they took it all from him, and would have killed him, but he escaped in the night. But he has lots more of the same sort—great houses full—and will send for them to make the hearts of the Shawnees glad. And when I go away to visit my great chief, he will take my place. He is a great man and a warrior, if his years are few. The chief, Sleepy Eye, would do well to be his friend," hinted Nunan.

"Sleepy Eye is the friend of Red Heart," emphatically replied the Shawnee.

"Well, then, until he has a lodge of his own, will not the chief offer him the shelter of *his* tent?" nodding toward the canvas one. "He will not wish you to leave it. And, chief," lowering his voice as if confidentially, and placing one hand upon the Shawnee's arm, "he will wish to take a squaw, to

make his clothes and keep the lodge-fire warm. Who should become the father of such a great man, but the war-chief of the Shawanoese? Then who could show more horses and wealth than Sleepy Eye? He would become still more powerful, until he ruled the whole tribe."

The wily diplomatist paused to note the effect of his words, and allow them time to more deeply impress the savage, whose glittering eye now belied his name, as it again dwelt upon the tall, graceful form of Vilott.

"The young chief is brave and handsome—who so fit a mate for him as the White Fawn of the Shawanoese? His eyes have seen her face and his heart is drunk. The father of her could do *any thing* with him. What does the chief say?" added Nunan, artfully.

"The Long Arm speaks wise words, and Sleepy Eye will think upon them. But let the young chief enter the lodge. It is his," slowly returned the chief.

A sparkle in the colonel's eye betrayed how pleased he was with this decision, for such he knew it was, despite the assumed irresolution of the savage. Nunan had a deeply-laid plan, and it was necessary for him to bind the young man to his interest in some way, and noting the deeply interested gaze of Vilott, naturally thought that in no way could he do so with more certainty, than to procure him the White Fawn for a wife.

In his arguments he had been guided rather by those that he knew would impress the chief most deeply, rather than a regard for truth. *His* object once gained, he intended abandoning his present post, and then, when Vilott had served his will as a sort of cat's-paw, he little cared how that worthy was to retrieve the pledges given so liberally by Nunan.

"Mr.—ah—Curd," spoke Nunan, placing one hand lightly upon Vilott's shoulder to attract his attention from the lodge, "you appear deeply interested in you tent. Suppose you enter and rest yourself for a spell? The chief, here, is kinder enough to place it at your disposal, and you may wish to inspect your new home. You may feel at ease," he added in a whisper; "the chief is your friend."

Vilott glanced uneasily from one to another of his companions, when Sleepy Eye advanced and said:

"Red Heart, like um go to rest in lodges? White Fawn in dere—she talk um big heap like long-knife. Mebbe so you like um talk to her, eh?"

"Thank you," added Vilott, eagerly. "I *am* tired, and as you are so kind—"

"Sleepy Eye like um young chief heap—big heap!" as Vilott hesitated. "Better you come, eh?"

"Go, man, and make the most of your opportunity," urged Nunan, in an aside. "I will see that you are not interrupted for an hour, at least."

Without further words Vilott turned and followed the huge savage, who motioned him to enter first. In the dim half-light of the interior, Vilott only had time to catch a glimpse of the bright, fairy-like form of her who had so deeply interested him as she sprung up from a sort of couch of furs, at their entrance. The chief spoke to her, saying, in Indian tongue:

"See, Sleepy Eye brings a friend to share his lodge. Let the Fawn see that he is made comfortable, and talk to him until the chief comes back," and with this by way of introduction, the swarthy old sinner returned to where Colonel Nunan was awaiting him, leaving the young couple together.

For several moments they stood gazing upon each other with mutual interest. Doubtless she had never before beheld such a perfect specimen of manly strength and beauty as he, and Vilott, although he had had considerable experience, mentally decided that he had never looked upon a being so beautiful in form and features, as the White Fawn.

This gaze continued until, with a sudden start and blush, the maiden dropped her eyes and advanced, saying, in a voice remarkably clear and musical:

"My father's friends are always welcome to his daughter. But you look tired; will you not be seated?"

"Thanks, fair lady," muttered Vilott, unconsciously adopting the tone of courtliness then current in fashionable society, "I accept your kind permission with gratitude, for truly, I am somewhat fatigued. Allow me," and with a bow as respectful and air as humble as though in presence of a queen, he handed the maiden to the couch she had just left, taking a seat at a little distance.

"I little dreamed, when I arrived here, that I should be so favored, or that such peerless grace and beauty dwelt in the wilderness," he added, his gaze still dwelling upon the blushing face of the White Fawn.

"Excuse me, Mr.—?"

"Vi—ah—Joseph Curd, lady," stammered he.

"—Mr. Curd, if I state that I shall esteem you far more highly if you do not deal in such idle compliments. They avail nothing, and besides, are really distasteful to me," continued the maiden in a tone that left no room for doubt regarding her perfect sincerity.

"With you, the truth must sound like compliment. But I will endeavor not to offend again, for to win your esteem, I would be willing to undertake a far more difficult task," responded the young man, eagerly.

"And again," smiled the maiden; "but never mind. I like your looks, and think that we will become friends. I have often longed for one to whom I could, at times, confide my thoughts, but had begun to despair of its ever being accomplished."

"Ah, if I could only believe that *you* did not practice the course you condemn in me!"

"A truce!" cried the Fawn, laughingly. "But I forgot; my father said for me to attend to your wants. Is there any thing I can do for you?" and she half arose.

"No, no!" eagerly exclaimed Vilott, reaching out until his hand rested upon one of hers, "only that you favor me with your presence."

"I see that you are incorrigible," and the maiden sunk back, blushing and withdrawing her hand from contact with his.

"Ah, now I have sinned again!"

"Not so, not so," and then for a few moments there was silence; broken however, by Vilott:

"Will you pardon me, lady, if I seem impertinently curious? But it seems marvelous that a person of *your* grace and acquirements should have passed her life here, among the untutored savages; and besides, where so few speak the language you are so perfect in!"

"My mother taught me," murmured the maiden, sadly.

"Your mother!"

"I should have said my adopted mother," corrected the Fawn. "I called her mother, for she was the only one I ever knew. She was the wife of the chief who has adopted me."

"But do you know nothing whatever of your parents; whether they are living or dead?"

"Alas! I have but too good reason to believe the latter. What I know was told me by—mother, who learned it from the chief. It seems that I was captured, along with a woman whom I believe to have been my real mother, at the massacre of a small settlement somewhere in Ohio. A number of others were also taken captive, but all died or were ransomed before I was old enough to recollect any thing."

"My mother—for so I must call her—lived to reach the village of the Indians, but there died from grief and fatigue. Then I was adopted by a kind squaw, the wife of the present chief, Sleepy Eye, and with him I have lived ever since."

"But not happily—have you never experienced a desire to return to the home of the whites, your own people?"

"Alas! yes, but what could I do? The chief, I believe, loves me as if I was in reality his own child, and keeps such a jealous watch upon me that any attempt at an escape would be vain. Of late I have felt this longing in a far greater degree, until I thought at times that I must die if I could not return, even though I would be a stranger among strangers."

"For a long time—until a year since—I was happy, very happy. The chief took a prisoner, a woman, and she was forced to become his wife. Between her and I a strong friendship sprung up, and she bestowed upon me the love that had been that of her murdered kindred. She was young and very beautiful, and well educated."

"It was her only solace, and my delight—the teaching me what she knew. From letters marked in the sand, or upon a robe with charcoal, she taught me to read, write and cipher. Then from a small store of books that were brought in by a foraging party, in a captured wagon, my studies went on."

"Ah, those were happy, delightful days, and the only bright spots in my life that memory can dwell upon, but they came to an end, too soon, alas! and I lost her who has proved mother—sister—every thing to me!" and the brig!

beautiful head was bowed in mute but deep anguish, while even Vilott experienced a choking sensation as he listened eagerly to the words of the White Fawn.

"One day she sickened and took to her bed, never again to leave it, in life. It was a slow fever that had long been undermining her constitution, and when she could no longer resist the insidious attacks, the end was speedy. She died—and was buried. I read over her grave the burial-service, from one of my little store of books, and since I have daily visited the grass-grown mound, that is held as sacred by all."

For some minutes silence was observed, save now and then by a faint sob from the maiden; for Vilott knew that her grief was too sacred for a stranger to attempt consolation. At length she raised her head, and with a faint smile said:

"I fear you will deem me but a sorry companion, if I thus make you the confidant of all my sorrows."

"No, no! far from it. I honor and respect you far more deeply than before. And I can perfectly sympathize with you in this, for I, too, have endured fearful wrongs from the red-man!"

And then he briefly detailed to her the eventful story of his early life.

"Let this be another bond of friendship between us," said the maiden, in a fervent tone, extending her hand that was warmly pressed by Vilott.

"But you are a free agent, and not compelled to associate with them—why are you here and upon such friendly terms with those who should only receive your deadly hatred?"

The young man hesitated to answer, and keenly scrutinized the features of his companion. But his answer was not given, for at that moment a faint yell was borne to their ears; a yell that was promptly caught up by a hundred throats in the village, until the neighboring woods resounded with the exciting clamor.

"My God!" gasped the White Fawn, clasping her hands in an agony of grief, "another captive, and one, too, whose fate is sealed! I hear the cry that tells of the death of Indians!"

They sat in anxious silence for some moments, when the door-flap was thrust hurriedly aside, and Colonel Nunan

entered with exultation imprinted upon his smooth, shining visage.

"Grand news, Mr. Curd, most glorious! Who do you think is here, a prisoner? One of your very particular friends?"

"Not—?"

"Yes, but it is, though! The Beaver is trapped at last, and now you will have the satisfaction of seeing for yourself how he can die. Goodness knows how many men he has killed, and nothing short of a miracle could save his life, now. Come, let's go and see him."

Vilott turned to follow the agent, but glanced back and beheld upon the face of the White Fawn, a mingled look of horror and grief. He half-paused, but then in obedience to a call from Nunan left the tent.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE STAKE.

"COME, Mr. Curd, if you are not there to exult over your fallen foe, the chief will think you are more ardent in love than war, and that would never do."

"Are you sure it is the Beaver?"

"As I am that you are Joseph Curd," promptly responded Nunan, as they hastened along through the lines of lodges.

"Good! but what will be his fate then?"

"Death—*death by fire!* Nothing more lenient would do, and if you think my advice worth taking, you will cast your vote for that doom also. It will not affect the result in the least, one way or the other, but it will 'take' well, and you will be esteemed all the more highly for it."

"But by fire! Any thing else, for he has hunted my life, and I owe him no good will; any thing else I might, but this—"

"It is better so," urged Nunan, "Without your vote, this would be his doom, but yours will be one of the first asked."

"And yours?"

"Will be as I advise you. He has already done me considerable damage, and it is only policy to put him out of the way of doing any more."

"And so will I vote for death, then, upon one condition; that, should I prefer a request at the time, you will back me with your approval, if necessary," slowly said Vilott.

"Agreed! But look—yonder he stands. A sturdy-looking knave, by my honor!"

Vilott glanced in the direction indicated, and there beheld the Chippewa, Ah-zah, firmly bound and encircled by his guards. He was standing proudly erect with a haughty expression upon his immobile features as the Shawnees poured upon him their biting taunts and jeers.

Only once this changed, as he noted the presence of Vilott. Then a brief and transitory scowl of vindictive hate and fury swept athwart his face, leaving it as before.

"He does not appear to be overly glad to see you, boss," muttered the voice of Ezra Duff, close beside the young man's elbow. "Cuss the hound, I'd rather see him thar than to find a millyun dollars."

"Then you know him?"

"*Don't* I jest! Wolf!" snarled the borderer. "I know him so well that I wish I hed the job o' settin' fire to the imp."

"I know him, too," briefly returned Vilott, moving aside.

"Come," said Nunan, "we must go to the council-house. See, there is the crier," and a moment after could be heard the shrill tones summoning them to council.

Nunan entered the great lodge, closely followed by Vilott, and way was silently made for them to the side of Sleepy Eye. After the indispensable ceremonies usual upon such occasions, one of the chiefs arose and spoke. He was the second in rank of those detailed by Sleepy Eye to lie in wait for the Beaver, on the preceding day.

He briefly detailed the incidents relative to the capture, adding that their long delay was caused by the injuries of Bear Claw, the chief, who had received such hurts, that he was unable to bear removal. But that he had since died.

Then, one by one, the chiefs and leading braves gave in their vote.

Without an exception their voices were for death. The only difference was that some voted for the other tortures first, running the gantlet, etc.

Sleepy Eye and Colonel Nunan added their voices for death by fire. Then all eyes were turned upon Vilott, who, in obedience to a hint from Nunan, arose, and spoke; the agent interpreting his words so that all might understand.

"Brothers! I come among you, a stranger, with a white skin. But if my breast was opened like a door, you could all see that my heart is red, like your own. I am an Indian, and wish to live with the Indians; but there is one whose skin is red that I hate. It is the Chippewa dog, 'The Beaver.'

"Brothers and friends! I have said that I was an Indian—a Shawnee—and so all their enemies are mine; but the Beaver is doubly so. He is a dog, and Red Heart will spit in his face, when the fire draws cries of agony from his lips. I say let him die; my voice is for death, and *by fire!*

"But we all know that the Chippewa is brave—how else could he dare to meet and strike the Shawnees upon the war-path? The scalps hang thick in his lodge, for my eyes have counted them. Then shall we waste time by idle play, so that he can laugh at us? No! I say again, let him die, but be it at once; the other tests would but make him laugh.

"And now, brothers, may I ask a favor of you? He is my enemy, and yet I can not strike him; he is not my prisoner. May I have the privilege of binding him to the death-stake, and of painting his face black?"

For some minutes the assembly remained silent, as if meditating upon the young stranger's request; and then, Nunan, reminded by Vilott of his pledge, arose:

"My children! You have all heard the words of the young chief, and know what he asks. I, for one, say let him bind his enemy, and triumph over him in that way. Remember he is great and powerful, and that when I am gone he will take my place."

This gentle hint probably turned the scale in Vilott's favor, and an unanimous assent was expressed, greatly to that person's delight, which he could not entirely conceal. Then the council soon after broke up, and Vilott, armed with a piece

of bark and bunch of tow, approached the prisoner where he was standing bound to a stump, surrounded by a pack of mischievous children, who were emulating the deeds of their fathers, with tiny bows and arrows, sticks, stones, and such missiles as lay to their hands.

These quickly dispersed at a sign from Vilott, who thus stood contemplating the fine form and stoical countenance of the Chippewa. The Beaver cast one quick, searching glance at his enemy, then divining his purpose, resumed his lofty, far-off stare.

"Well, Beaver, my friend, you see what your enmity to me brings you to? Do you know that the chiefs in council have doomed you to die by fire?"

The savage deigned no answer.

"Listen, Beaver, and do not make any sign while I am painting you," muttered Vilott, in a low tone, as he noted his actions were being watched by several of the chiefs. "I wish to help you, if it is in my power, for I should deeply regret to see you die by fire. I think I *can* save you if you will promise me one thing:

"Will you join the Shawnees and become one of them, if your life is spared?"

"Is the Beaver a dog?" quietly responded the prisoner, with a sneer.

"Good! Had you answered otherwise, I should have left you to your fate; but now, I *will* give you a chance for your life. It will be a desperate one, but at any rate, better than to be roasted alive for the benefit of them devils," whispered Vilott, earnestly, as he proceeded to artistically daub the black paint upon the Beaver's face.

"You have been my enemy, and have hunted my life; have sworn to take my scalp; and I don't blame you, after what you heard and saw. But, I don't forget that you saved my life once, and I will try and show you that I can be grateful.

"That's right: do not move, but now listen well. When the sun touches the tree-tops yonder, the fires around you will be lighted. I have gained permission to bind you, and to apply the torch. I will do this, and then give you a chance for life.

"The cords I shall arrange, so that one powerful jerk will loosen them so that they will drop to the ground. But you must wait until the smoke hides you before you do this.

"You must pretend to get mad at my taunts, and curse and revile me as bitterly as you can. Don't spare the hard words, for my skin is tough and I can bear them. Then I will throw a tomahawk at you, and as if it had cut the cords, do you leap out, and *knocking me down—I will be upon the right side*—cut your way through the crowd, if possible.

"I will hide a knife in your breech-clout also, for your use. When once free from the crowd, make for the red stone beneath the dead tree on the little rise yonder—do you see?—and by it you will find a rifle, powder and bullets. Then the rest is with you."

"The Beaver hears the Silver Tongue, and will remember," briefly replied the Chippewa, in his own language; but no trace of emotion, whether of hope or doubt, appeared upon his features.

Vilott left the captive, having completed his task, and returned to the group of chiefs. Sleepy Eye glanced at him inquiringly, and the young man answered his mute question.

"Red Heart told the Beaver what the chiefs had decided, but he did not tremble. He is a great brave, and I fear he will not tickle our ears with his cries and groans."

"Ugh! um Beaver is a dog. Fire mek' 'um holler, bum-by!" grunted the chief, in a displeased tone.

The younger braves and squaws were now set to gathering wood and twigs for the contemplated *barbecue*, and as if to express his joy, at the thoughts of the death of his foe, Vilott gathered several loads. But no eye, as he thought, noted that upon one of these trips he carried out a rifle and ammunition, although in their place he brought back a load of wood.

It seemed as if he really intended keeping his word with the Beaver.

Several hours must intervene before the designated period—perhaps an hour and a half before sunset—and to Vilott, the moments dragged slowly and tardily by. He could hardly resist the inclination he felt of again seeking the presence of the White Fawn; but he dreaded the questions she would put to him, as he recalled the glance he had received at parting.

But at length the signal was given, and the Chippewa was led up to the blackened torture-post, and there resigned to the hands of the young man; the guards forming in a circle, at a little distance. Vilott was nervous, and fearful lest something should occur to frustrate his plan, and cast a quick glance around him.

The savages appeared to be busily engaged in talking or else preparing splinters or instruments with which to add to the prisoner's tortures, and he gained assurance from this fact. So with the rawhide strips furnished for the purpose, Vilott bound the Beaver with such adroitness, that it appeared impossible for him to move a limb, while at the same time they were applied so that one vigorous shake would cast them entirely free.

He also contrived to slip a keen knife inside the prisoner's breech-clout, where it could be easily grasped. Then he stepped back and began to pile the fagots up in a circle around the Chippewa.

While thus engaged he kept up a running fire of jeers and taunts, exhibiting an ingenuity in that line that commanded the admiration of even those masters in the art, the Shawnees.

For a time the features of the Beaver did not move, or betray any traces of emotion, but then his eye began to glitter and the muscles of his face and throat to work and quiver, as if he was struggling to repress an angry retort. This symptom was noticed, and hailed with long, loud yells of joy by the Shawnees, for they thought there was now a fine prospect for sport and triumph over their hated foe.

But as the circle of wood was nearly completed, the Chippewa broke out into a torrent of taunts and vituperation at the young man, delivered in such an earnest, natural manner, that he was startled for a moment, believing that the Beaver had lost confidence in his promise, and was thus venting his rage and hatred.

No wonder, then, that the Shawnees were deceived.

"Whoo! the air stinks in my nostrils! Who is it I see before me? Bah! it is a dog with a white skin, and a piece of dirt for a heart! The squaws and papposes of the long-knives cropped his ears and then whipped him out into the

woods with sticks. Whoo! the Shawanoese call him a great brave; it is good!"

"Bah! the Beaver is a hare; he is all legs. The paint upon his face is friendly; it hides from the eyes of men that his skin is white like the winter's snow. The Shawnees laugh at him. They now see his face for the first time; but they well know the shape of his back. It is always turned in the way his breast should be," jeered Vilott, with well-dissembled rancor.

"The white dog has a long tongue. He hid in the bushes once, and heard men talk. Now he is like the mock-bird—he repeats their words. Ugh! the Shawanoese are cowardly curs, but they are too good for you. The rods of the pap-pooes still mark your back; can you show a manly scar upon your person? No! the bullet or arrow could not overtake you—you run away so fast!"

"You lie! thief—dog!" shouted Vilott, as if in a frenzy of rage, that was augmented by a low, taunting laugh from the prisoner.

The chief, Sleepy Eye, seeing that the triumph was now upon the other side, gave the signal for the torch to be applied, whereupon Vilott hastened to a neighboring tent, and speedily returned with a blazing brand in one hand and a glittering tomahawk in the other. The latter he used to splinter off some wood, so that the fire would ignite with less difficulty, but this was only to cover his real intentions.

He intended furnishing the Beaver with this weapon, in addition to the knife concealed upon his person.

The blazing torch was quickly applied, and the forked flame was soon thrusting out its tongues in a dozen different places. Then Vilott stepped back a few paces and uttered a wild, triumphant yell, that appeared equally as sincere as those sent up by the Shawnees.

Colonel Nunan took his position close beside Vilott, and stood calmly gazing upon the scene, with an occasional side-glance at the young man. The latter noted this, and a vague feeling of uneasiness sprung up in his heart, for he fancied he could discern a deep, subtle meaning in them, that told him that his plans were at least suspected, and boded ill for their success.

Several times he changed his position, but the agent ever continued close at his elbow; and then, with a desperate resolve to carry out his part of the programme, at any and every cost, Vilott returned to a position in a direct line with the tree beneath which the rifle was hidden.

He had continued his taunts, together with the remainder of the spectators, but the Beaver only replied to him. Their words were bitter and galling, and appeared deeply sincere.

But Vilott felt that the moment for action was close at hand, and could not long be delayed without a fatal result. The flames were now springing up more fiercely, and already the scanty clothing of the prisoner was beginning to smoke and char, showing that his pain must be intense; yet he did not flinch, nor did his voice lose any of its firm clearness.

Vilott gave one quick glance toward the nonchalant agent, and to his astonishment fancied that he received a slight nod in return, as of approval. Wrought to desperation he drew the keen hatchet, and in answer to a biting taunt of the prisoner's, yelled out, madly:

"Die, then, you lying dog!" and cast the gleaming weapon with a true aim at the post.

It struck fair, and from the circling smoke came a cry as of mortal agony, that made the young man's heart turn sick within him, for he feared he had killed the brave Chippewa.

But it was only a ruse, for, favored by the smoke, the Beaver cast loose his bow, jerked the hatchet from the post, the knife from his waist, and then, with a wild, fierce howl of long pent-up anger, leaped from the fearful circle of fire into the midst of his enemies.

Vilott he rushed against, and that person, increasing the momentum thus received, staggered back against the agent, bringing him to the ground, and as he himself fell, contrived to trip up the chief, Sleepy Eye.

Before the sort of stupor that seized upon the Shawnees at this unexpected turn or change in the programme had vanished, both the gleaming weapons had descended; and when they rose they shone with a dull red glare in the rays of the setting sun. Again they descended, and again the life-blood dripped from their edges.

Then the Shawnees appeared to cast off the mental incubus

that fettered them, and swarmed around him with wild yells. The three men who had fallen in a heap, were still struggling as if endeavoring to arise, but it seemed as though both the whites were only trying to prevent Sleepy Eye from regaining his feet. Then he shouted out to his braves:

"Do not harm him—take him alive. The one who disobeys, shall die the death of a dog!"

That this order was strictly obeyed, is the only reason that the Beaver was not immediately overpowered. To it he owed his life, and most desperately did he avail himself of the opportunity.

Again and again the weapons descended, now drinking the life-blood of a savage, and now parrying some stunning blow from a club or a rifle-butt.

It was a fearful sight to behold the fierce and deadly raging of the human passions; to see the blood-stained weapons flash in the bright sunlight; to hear the fated blow, the muttered curse, as the keen steel pierces the sensitive flesh; to see here a human form fall to the earth perchance to arise no more, or struggling to his feet and again mingle in the *melée*.

Oh, it was a thrilling sight to witness that one man fighting against a host, for liberty—for life! Though faint, he struggled on, dealing deep wounds or death at every stroke of his weapons, now dotted with hair and gore.

With almost superhuman efforts the Beaver nears the edge of the wood, his path marked with dead and dying bodies, and his fearful weapons keeping a clear space around him, so ubiquitous did they seem. But then Sleepy Eye extricates himself and springs to his feet.

He grasps a heavy, blazing fagot and leaps forward toward the Chippewa. But once again he is foiled by the two whites, who appear most unaccountably clumsy, although so eager to assist in his capture.

Then with a taunting yell, the Beaver bursts clear of the ruck, and speeds with almost the swiftness of an arrow's flight, directly for the dead tree and red rock. The Indian agent and Vilott were now foremost, and followed ardently upon the track of the fleeing Chippewa.

Sleepy Eye came next, and was gaining upon them; close in his rear ran the rest of the braves and sub-chiefs. Just

as the chief was forging past Vilott, the young man stumbled and fell violently to the ground before the savage, who was cast headlong with fearful violence, in a senseless heap. Nunan was also tripped up by the feet of the sprawling men and came to the ground, most unfortunately for the hopes of the Shawnees, directly in their path.

Before they could check their speed or turn aside, some half a dozen more fell at full length over the prostrate, writhing heap. And when they once more sprung forward in pursuit, the Beaver had gained the tree, secured the weapons and vanished in the forest with another taunting yell of triumph.

Really, such a series of mishaps as this was never before witnessed, and probably the two whites were disgusted with their own clumsiness, for, instead of continuing the chase, they picked up the still insensible chief and slowly returned to the village, where was a scene of noisy, fearful grief as the squaws and papposes wailed and mourned over the dead and dying warriors who had fallen victims to the prowess of the Beaver.

Under their care, Sleepy Eye quickly returned to consciousness, and then learned of the escape of his bitter enemy, for so far, at least, with terrible rage and fury. At first he seemed inclined, naturally, to blame the two white men, but a few significant words from the agent, soon cooled him down.

CHAPTER X.

A DOUBLE TRIUMPH.

As we have seen, the scout, Simon Kenton, was far from being out of danger when he had so adroitly overcome the Shawnee who had so unexpectedly stumbled upon his covert. With the reader's kind permission we will revert to him once more, and trace up his fortunes for a brief space.

As he sprung up from the friendly covert of the secret passage, he had recovered in a great measure from the

fatigue produced by his Herculean exertions of the day, and as the blood had ceased flowing from the wound in his side, he felt almost a new man. But if he had been benefited by the brief respite, so also had his foes, and they bounded after him like bloodhounds, in full cry.

Kenton echoed back a low, taunting laugh of defiance and contempt, for he knew that, barring accidents, he had the race in his own hands. A short mile was all that interposed between him and the dense forest, and while at a trial of speed, he could fully hold his own, he knew that he had nothing to fear from the savages, when once safe within the wood.

He had almost reached the trees, when he caught a far-off glimpse of a point of light, down a vista; most probably from some camp-fire. But if it was such, who had built it? Surely, a red-man!

With this hasty conclusion the scout diverged to the right in order not to approach the suspicious object too closely, for he knew that if human beings had been there, they must have been alarmed by the still echoing yells of his pursuers. But suddenly a loud, clear voice called out, almost directly before him, in plain English:

"Who is it—white or red?"

"Both—I'm Simon Kenton, and there comes a drove of Shawnees!"

"Drop down and we will attend to them," added the voice.

Kenton acted on the hint, and as if stumbling involuntarily, he pitched forward headlong to the ground, uttering a sharp cry as if of pain. The Shawnees, who had gained considerably during the momentary pause of the fugitive, now sprung ahead with eager cries of exultation as they noted the fall, feeling assured that their prey was at length in their power.

On, until within a score yards of the scout, who still lay as if senseless, although, had not the savages been so excited, they might have noted that Kenton's head had taken the place of his heels, and that before him protruded the long barrel of his deadly rifle.

But this they did not heed, and then came a loud, clear cry from the woods:

"Fire, men, and then charge!"

The crack of the hunted scout's rifle was blended with that of a score of others, and fully half of that number of redskins dropped to the ground, either slain or biting the dust in the agony of their death-wounds.

The remnant of the band—a scant half-dozen—stood as if petrified in their tracks, astonished by this unexpected defeat where they only anticipated triumph. Then again pealed forth the voice:

"Charge! and don't let one escape to tell the tale!"

The speaker led the way, followed by a crowd of hardy borderers, who yelled and whooped like demons as they brandished their thirsty weapons.

Side by side with Simon Kenton the tall stranger dashed up to the Indians, and as with one motion, their weapons cut down the two nearest, while the other four, as if thus released from a spell, turned and fled with wild shrieks of terror and dismay.

But their limbs were wearied and their muscles weak from long and excessive exertion, while those in pursuit, trained to the wild, adventuresome life that inured them to great toil, were fresh and unjaded.

The race was short, over the level plain, and before it was crossed, the distance was marked by four more ghastly forms, lying as they fell, the bright moonlight shedding its silvery sheen over their copper-tinted faces, told who they were.

Half an hour later the place was silent and deserted by all save the dead. But these presented a ghastly and fearful aspect.

Where had proudly and defiantly waved and flaunted the braided and ornamented scalp-lock but a few short minutes before, was now naught save a glowing, gory spot. They had been scalped.

At a short distance from this spot of death, in a small, well-screened glade, Simon Kenton and his rescuers were gathered around the embers of a small fire. One man was rudely but kindly bandaging the wound Kenton had received earlier in the day.

It was a bad-looking gash, but merely a flesh-wound, dangerous only from the profuse loss of blood. Among the group could be seen several borderers who were engaged in stretch-

ing the reeking scalps so lately torn from the heads of the dead and dying, upon hazel hoops.

One man in particular, as he stood in silence, leaning upon the muzzle of a long, weather-beaten rifle, was noticeable, not alone from his peculiar appearance, but from the extraordinary number of hairy trophies that dangled at his belt, in various stages of freshness.

He was a large, muscular, bony-framed man, of perhaps forty years, although he might be a decade on either side of that age. He was but little less than six feet in height, and if his form was not remarkable for its grace and symmetry, it was for enormous physical strength and activity.

His shoulders, powerful as an ox's, were broad and round, appearing still more so from his habit of craning his head forward. His legs and arms were long and somewhat ungainly, but one look at the bosses of working, writhing muscles, told how convenient they were for the wild life he led.

His complexion was naturally dark, and had been rendered a still deeper tinge by long exposure to all weathers, until now he matched that of his hated foes, the Indians. His features were bold and massive, but rather coarse and by no means good-looking.

His face was gaunt, bony and rather long, with a thin, curved nose and high cheek-bones. His eyes were small, but extraordinarily black and piercing, but in repose they had an intelligent expression.

In brief, his countenance was very contradictory, combining frankness, humor and good-nature, with cunning, deceit, and intense ferocity; but still these conflicting traits clearly portrayed his nature and character.

To his friends, the former prevailed; the other toward his enemies. If his hatred was bitter and almost demoniac, his likings and friendships were equally as lasting and fervent.

His dress was quite as incongruous, and was composed of skins, both tanned and with the hair still on; of woolen and cotton; a wampum-ornamented belt, evidently the trophy of some victorious encounter with his foe, the red-man, supported a knife and hatchet, both tarnished and gory, the steel being bare in both cases, their handles being thrust through slits cut in the skin.

We have thus been minute and particular in describing the borderer, because, although so renowned and rendered famous in history, there are but few who have any idea whatever of his personal appearance.

The one most dreaded by his enemies—who embraced all in whose veins flowed a drop of savage blood—he was one of the most celebrated and successful Indian-fighters that lived in those times when each man was a hero, and that accomplishment formed part of their daily life. The Indians knew no more deadly foe, or one that they so greatly dreaded.

Need we say it was LEWIS WHETZEL?

“Well, mister—I don’t know your name, but I owe you one for this turn, although I do suppose I should have got clear anyhow,” spoke Kenton, turning to the leader of the little party, if such there could be, where each man rested upon his own merits.

“The pleasure of helping one so well known and dear to all white men as Mr. Kenton, is its own reward,” courteously replied the other. “But I am called Judge Grainger.”

“That so? glad to see ye. But it was with one of your scouts, and *after* a runaway from your burg, that got me into this scrape.”

“Indeed!” eagerly exclaimed Grainger. “Do you mean—”

“The one whom the Beaver was trailing—who had acted the snake; Vilott, I believe is his name.”

“Then you know where he is likely to be found? He murdered one of our members, and was selling us to the Shawnees when he was detected. We are after him now. Indeed, it is our main object, although we thought it high time to strike a blow at these red demons before they do any more mischief.”

Kenton explained the events of the day; how they had seen Vilott join the band under Sleepy Eye, and appearing to be upon friendly terms with them. Then giving a short sketch of his adventures; when he mentioned the savage being slain in the ditch, Whetzel left the band and entered the forest, bent upon adding another scalp to those already at his waist.

In return Grainger detailed the events concerning Vilott’s treachery, adding that they had sent out messengers for rein-

forcements, and then had taken up the trail of the Beaver, left plain for that purpose with the intention of running the traitor to earth, and if practicable, to strike a blow at their common enemy that would be remembered.

By Kenton's advice the fire was extinguished, and guards set around the glade to prevent surprise from any roving band of savages. He had learned enough during his espial in Sleepy Eye's village before meeting with the Beaver, to form a plan of attack that he believed could not help but be successful, if ordinary precautions were used, but it was now too late to start that night.

It was decided to remain where they were, keeping out spies and scouts, until late in the afternoon of the next day, and then to advance upon the village, timing it so that the assault would be made not long after midnight, when the surprise would equalize numbers, if not turn the scale in their favor, as they would doubtless be joined by the allies sent for, some time during the day.

The night and succeeding day passed without any incident of moment, and at dusk the little band of whites, now reinforced, were safely across the level plateau, using the secret passage, and upon their road to the village of Sleepy Eye. But they were suddenly interrupted by the sound of a rifle-shot, not far ahead.

Instantly they sought cover, and Kenton found himself alongside of Whetzel; a most fortunate circumstance, as it afterward proved. The sound of rapid footfalls was now heard, and then a dusky form darted into view.

"Do not fire—it's a friend—the Beaver."

Whetzel's rifle sprung to his shoulder, notwithstanding, but Kenton had noted the action and caught the hammer upon his palm. Whetzel had no time to remonstrate, for as the Beaver, who had recognized the voice of the judge, sought cover, four red-skins leaped out into view, and seeing their new adversaries, paused in bewilderment.

A flash of flame-tinged smoke, a roar, and where the Shawnees had stood lay four riddled forms, their life having flown out of their bodies from a dozen wounds.

When once more the onward march was resumed, Whetzel had added one more trophy to his ghastly collection.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT OF EVENTS.

AFTER the wrath of the chief, Sleepy Eye, was appeased, Colonel Nunan motioned for Vilott to follow him, and as the young man could not well refuse, the two left the lodge, and proceeded across the creek in silence. The Indian agent was the first to speak :

"Rather an unlucky *finale* to our anticipated sport, Mr.—ah—Curd, eh?"

"It was so. But who could have foreseen it? I was so enraged at that red devil, that had my own life depended upon my remaining quiescent, I should have acted just as I did."

"Ah?" uttered Nunan, placidly stroking his long, tawny mustache.

"Yes," pursued Vilott, stealing an uneasy glance at his companion's face, "and had I not been so angered that my hand was unsteady, he would not have escaped so easy."

"Indeed! why I thought that—considering the circumstances—your hand and aim were remarkably steady."

"Why, I missed him!"

"Just so; you missed *him*, but, *you hit the post*. And how convenient it was, too, for him to have such a weapon to aid him in escaping!" and Vilott thought he could detect a sneer beneath the low, smooth tone. "And then again he had a knife. Did you throw it, also? I didn't see you do *that*."

"Perhaps he got it from the man he killed first."

"Ah, yes; perhaps! But wasn't it curious that you, who look so quick and active, should have been so confused that you kept both Sleepy Eye and myself from doing any thing?"

"Colonel Nunan," firmly, almost defiantly said Vilott, looking his companion full in the eye, "you talk in enigmas. Perhaps you will favor me by their solution."

"Well, Mr. Curd," said the agent, changing his manner and speaking in a sharp, decisive tone that surprised Vilott,

"I don't know but it would be the better course. Then allow me to congratulate you upon the complete success of your bold plans. It was truly well carried out, considering the obstacles, and I give you credit for it."

"Then you—"

"Yes. I am not blind, and am naturally observant. I suspected you of secretly desiring the escape of the Beaver, and although he has been a *bête noir* of mine, I thought best not to interfere. I saw you slip the knife in his breech-clout, and my idea being strengthened by that, I saw that you had arranged his bonds so that in reality he was not bound at all.

"I saw you go out with a rifle and come back without it. I saw through your ruse in abusing the prisoner, and that your anger was but assumed. The remainder you know."

"Indeed, you are a great deal smarter than I gave you credit for. But, why did you not reveal this to the chief, then?"

"For my own benefit, you may be sure. Had I done so, you would have kept the Beaver company, and for that matter, it is not yet too late to place you at the stake left vacant by your act. I have but to say the word."

"And that word—"

"Will never pass my lips, on the one condition that you serve me faithfully. Frankly, you are not the kind of person I anticipated; you have far too independent a will of your own, to exactly suit my purpose. But in this act of yours, I saw that I should gain a hold over you that would be a guarantee of your faithfulness; one that you dare not break. Now do you understand me?"

"I think I do," slowly responded Vilott. "And you will keep your counsel?"

"Just so long as you are true. I saw this, I say, and so I helped you keep back the chief. Luckily he thinks our clumsiness was natural, and not assumed," laughed Nunan. "But listen. I see that you are struck with the Fawn's appearance, and, as that will be still another tie, I will help you secure her to yourself. To a marriage proper, or one *a la sauvage*, just as you prefer."

"Thank you. And now, as you so abruptly broke off our *tête-a-tête*, I will return and renew the siege," said Vilott, laughingly.

"Good fortune be with you, then ; but remember, I wish to see you the first thing in the morning."

"I will not forget," and the young man slowly proceeded toward the canvas tent.

His mind was not altogether at ease, as was evidenced by his hesitating steps, and he paused for some moments without the tent before raising the door-flap, and entering.

The White Fawn, who had been reclining upon the couch of skins, sprung to her feet and shrunk away from the young man. Vilott noted this and bit his lip as he spoke :

"Pardon me, lady, if I alarmed you by my unceremonious entrance, but—"

"It was not alarm, sir," replied the maiden, with a slight emphasis, "it was wonder."

"Wonder?"

"Yes, wonder that you should have the boldness to face me in whose veins flow white blood, after your barbarity and cruelty there," and then she motioned toward the torture-post with a shudder of abhorrent dread.

"Ah, then you were an eye-witness?"

"Of a portion merely, but yet long enough to note that you were the head one in tormenting the unhappy being; long enough to see that it was *your* hand that applied the torch, and, above all the clamor, I could distinguish *your* voice exceeding all the others in taunts and revilings."

"Do you know who the captive was?" responded Vilott, after a pause.

"I do not ; some countryman of your own, perhaps."

"No, he was not of our race," slowly said Vilott. "He was an Indian—one who had sworn to hunt me to my death—who had sworn an oath never to leave my trail until he had taken my scalp. And he was captured while trailing me hither."

"Even so ; does that excuse you ? Surely you must have given him great cause for hatred?"

"Lady—White Fawn—" began Vilott, approaching her with a lowered and changed tone.

"My mother gave me the name of Annie—it was her name," and the maiden looked wonderingly at the young man.

"It is well; you should be called thus. It was also another's name," said Vilott, in a subdued tone. "But now I beg you to listen to me. It is right you should, for you have deeply wronged me. May I speak?"

Annie bowed slightly, evidently surprised.

"I must speak low, as, if what I say should be overheard it would doom me to the death that the Beaver escaped. I have told you that this savage was my enemy, but I was never his.

"Owing to a peculiar chain of incidents he was led to believe that I was a traitor to my race, and so he told them with whom I lived. They believed him—with the proofs adduced, they could do no less—and I was bound, a prisoner.

"But I escaped. It was necessary, if I hoped to clear myself and accomplish the object that had led me into this trouble. Delay might prove fatal: I left all and fled; so that they—my friends, and those I had learned to love—could not but believe me the horrible wretch that I had been painted.

"Well, this man was captured and doomed to death. I added my vote to that of those condemning him, because I saw that it could not change the tide, and by this course I would not be suspected—would then have a better chance to carry out my plans. I claimed the privilege of binding him, so that I could assist him to escape.

"I furnished him with weapons and did all that lay in my power to hinder and retard his pursuers, when he was fleeing for life. All this did I do, at the peril of my life, and now I am reproached by the only one here whose censure is truly painful!"

"If this is—if I have wronged you—" faltered Annie, advancing and extending her hand, "I beg your pardon. God knows that I have few enough friends, and would not alienate one of them, willfully, even a comparative stranger."

Vilott soon began to speak, and it was evident that his whole heart was in the subject, for he spoke long and earnestly, with the small hand of the White Fawn tightly clasped in his own. That she was deeply interested and affected by his words, was plain, for painful sobs shook her slight frame and she gradually nestled closer to his manly form, until at length her head sunk upon his breast and her arms wound themselves tightly around him.

Vilott tenderly clasped her form, and bending, pressed a gentle kiss upon her brow, while a smile of triumphant joy illumined his handsome features. There they sat, while the minutes rolled up into hours.

Neither appeared to think of the time, and had there not come an interruption, doubtless they would have remained there until the dawn of day startled them. But such came.

Vilott suddenly raised his head, and the White Fawn shrunk back with a deep blush. But she did not speak, as the young man cautiously placed one finger upon his lips and then noiselessly drew toward him the rifle that rested by his side.

This was pointed toward the rear of the tent, where, gleaming like a diamond, was the point of a keen knife that was silently cutting the stout cloth. This point of light, shining in the rays of the lamp, now turned and glided in a transverse direction, until it had formed three sides of a square, and then the severed flap was slowly raised.

A dusky, bronzed face now appeared at the hole, the face of an Indian redolent with its war-paint. It was protruded so far through the aperture that it seemed as though its owner courted observation than otherwise, and as the lineaments became plainer, the threatening rifle slowly sunk to the ground, and Vilott exclaimed:

"The Beaver!"

"Yeh, but don't mek noise. Shawnee um got big ears all same like jackass," and with a silent laugh the Chippewa entered the tent, carefully replacing the severed flap.

"Silver Tongue he save um Beaver from fire—den Beaver he mus' save um white frien'."

"Save me! why, what do you mean?"

"Tell um not mek holler?" nodding toward the astonished White Fawn.

"She is a friend; go on."

"Den lis'en, quick. Mus' run 'way off from dis, 'ca'se goin' to mek burn—kill um all."

"Then the whites are about to make an attack?"

"Yeh. Better you go fus', fo' dey kill you two, *quick*," earnestly added the spy.

"Who are they, then?"

"White chief at big lodge, Leaping Panther—White Devil—lots!"

"Come, Annie, we must go. I can trust this person, for I saved his life to-day, as you see. If we remain here, we are in danger from both parties. These men come from Grain-gerville, and would shoot me like a dog, if they found me here."

"But where can we go?" asked the White Fawn, anxiously.

"Back to the fort," firmly replied Vilott. "I can explain all now, and they will listen to me by this time."

"Mus' mek hurry, like debble!" impatiently whispered the Beaver. "'Less dey git mad an' shoot mighty fas' dis way. Bes' come *now*."

"Go on, I will follow," firmly added the White Fawn; and hastily securing such weapons as he could lay his hands upon, Vilott conducted the maiden through the aperture, out into the night, following the lead of the Beaver.

"Where want to go?" whispered that worthy, falling back to speak with more safety.

"The nearest trail toward the big lodge," resolutely replied Vilott.

"What fo' dat, eh? White man dey kill um den, fo' sure!"

"I must go. I can show them I have not been the traitor they think. They will not hurt me."

"If *mus'* go dere, den come. But Beaver he be sorry like de debble fo' you when de men's dey cotch um tight."

The Chippewa led them safely through the cordon of lodges, and then in a roundabout course—in order to avoid the ambushed white men, as he explained—back to the woods. Then pausing, he said to the young man:

"See, dis um trail. Bes' you tek um big star fo' guide, den you keep um right trail."

"Thank you, Beaver," warmly replied Vilott, pressing the red-skin's hand. "And when you're through with this job, you had better tell the judge and his son that they will find me at the fort."

"See! Silver Tongue he save um Beaver's life an' scalp. Dat mek um Injun big—heap big frien', so dat if tell um go here, dere, *anywhere*, Beaver he go, fo' pale-face. When long-knives dey go back, den Chippewa he come too, an' tell um: *mus'* tek *his* scalp fust, 'fore dey hurt frien'. Now go; foller

star," and as he concluded this—for him—extraordinary long speech, the grateful savage glided noiselessly away into the deeper shadows of the forest, leaving the young couple together.

"Come, Annie," said Vilott, tenderly drawing her hand through his arm, "we had in truth, better go. We are in great danger here, and it will be increased tenfold, when the attack is made. We have both reds and whites to fear now, until the fort is reached."

And then, with the bright twinkling star for a guide, they set out upon their long and arduous journey.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHAPTER OF EXPLANATIONS.

WE do not contemplate a description of the night attack by the combined forces of the whites, upon the village of Sleepy Eye, although there was many a deed of daring there enacted; many a scene in that bloody drama that possessed intense interest.

We need not narrate the great terror and surprise of the dreaming savages as they were awakened from their rest by the loud yells and shouts of the terrible "long-knives," only to find half of their lodges in flames as they rushed out into the open air, to meet with a more sudden, if less painful death, by bullet or by knife-thrust.

Nor the terrible deeds of Lew Whetzel—"The White Devil"—as he raged like a demon in the carnival of blood, taking ample vengeance upon the race that had murdered his parents. Nor of Simon Kenton, the "Leaping Panther," or his not less brave and reckless *confreres*.

Neither will we detail the desperate combat between those two long-time rivals and foes, the Beaver, and Sleepy Eye, the Herculean chief; suffice it to state that the latter succumbed before his more agile antagonist, who yelled in mad triumph as he flourished the reeking long-crested trophy, before seeking new victims.

In brief, the attack was a success. The Indians were annihilated, despite their superior number, and with a comparatively

small loss to the whites. But there was sincere grief over the nine dead men, when the carnage was over, and hot, scalding tears fell from eyes that had long been strangers to such visitors, over the motionless forms.

Ere the sun arose, a ghastly cavalcade was winding its slow and toilsome way through the forest, leaving behind them a woeful scene of ruin and death, around which already prowled the gaunt forms of howling wolves, who were ever shadowed by the wings of the slowly circling birds of prey, who had sighted the feast prepared for them from afar.

Upon rude litters, their faces covered with garments, were borne the dead men who had fallen in the assault, and such as were too seriously wounded to walk. Hence their progress was slow, although most of them were eager to arrive at their homes, for the Beaver had faithfully delivered Vilott's message, which was, in turn, imparted to them by the judge. Their hatred was then raging anew, and they had already doomed the traitor to an ignominious death.

Judge Grainger, alone, did not appear to share their feelings, or else they were smothered in his breast, as he thoughtfully perused sundry blood-stained papers, taken from a large pocket-book. They had come to him strangely enough.

During the assault, he was met by a half-dressed white man, who promptly crossed swords with him. But for a stumble upon his adversary's part, Judge Grainger would have now made one of the number upon the litter.

As Colonel Nunan stumbled forward, his own sword glided beneath the other one, instead of piercing his breast as intended, while Grainger's weapon passed completely through his foe's body. Then, as the agent staggered back, a pocket-book flew from his breast and caught upon his adversary's sword-hilt.

Almost unconsciously, Grainger thrust it into his bosom, and now its contents appeared to be deeply interesting him. But we leave them there, to follow Vilott and his companions.

Through all that long night they toiled onward, and with an hour's rest in the morning, they again pressed on, aweary and hungered, but eager to reach the haven they were aiming for. It was nearly night when the fort was sighted, and they were admitted without delay, the sight of a woman apparently disarming all suspicions.

The sentinel was "dumbfounded" when he saw who they were, and still more so when Vilott surrendered to him his weapon, requesting to be put under guard until the return of the judge and his companions. But this was done finally, and Seth Bender once more mounted guard over the young man, this time keeping a keen look-out upon the every movement of his son, "Crazy Dicky," lest he should take it into his head to once more attempt the escape of the "nice gentleman."

Fletcher Vilott had not acted thus without a deep reason. He knew that he would be safer thus than were he left at liberty, when the settlers should return, for, hot-headed and vindictive, there would be some among their number who would not hesitate to take the case into their own hands, and save the trouble of a trial by a pellet of lead, artistically delivered.

Besides, it would impress an idea that he could satisfactorily explain matters, or else why should he put his life in their power, when once safe? This was his reasoning, and events proved he was correct.

The body of settlers did not return until nearly dawn, and then the case of the young man was called up before Judge Grainger, who acted in that capacity by an unanimous request. Their rage and hate had had time to somewhat calm down, but yet Vilott was greeted with a volley of groans and hisses, among which were many a stinging taunt and bitter epithet. But he heeded them not, save by one cool, defiant glance.

The preliminary proceedings were hurried through, and the first charge read—that of *murder*—to which Vilott pleaded *not guilty*. He was then allowed to tell his story in his own way, somewhat as follows:

"Gentlemen, you have accused me of a vile crime, of which I am not guilty. But nevertheless I admit that *I did kill Joseph Curd*: mark, however, it was done in *self-defense*.

"Upon that day I was returning from Harrodsburg, by the North Trail, and by chance I ran across a piece of writing-paper, that looked as if just dropped for it had not been exposed long enough for the rain to wet it through. I opened and read it—there was no seal—from first to last, and by it I discovered the most vile and horrible plot possible for a man to concoct, being nothing more or less than an answer to an offer of delivering up this post to the savages!

"It was plainly addressed to *Joseph Curd*, and signed by *Colonel David Nunan*.

"I was still gazing upon it, as if petrified, when the owner appeared, searching every inch of ground for the lost letter. He glanced up in time to see me fold the paper, and then approached, his face white with fear and anger.

"He demanded its return. I refused. He pretended it was merely a joke he had gotten up, and I said that I would assist him in its execution by showing it to you, and turned away.

"I caught a noise, and glanced over my shoulder. Curd was raising his rifle, but, as you know, I am rather quick on the trigger, and I wheeled and fired, as he did, only my ball pierced his heart, while his merely ruffled my hair.

"Then I searched his body and found ample proof that he had really meditated the crime. I also found that upon that same day he was to meet an agent of Nunan's at the Cross-Oak, and I determined to take his place, to further a plan of my own."

"But why did you not inform us of your discovery?" demanded one of the jurors.

"One moment and you will comprehend. I crave your indulgence while I explain my reasons for acting so strangely," returned Vilott, and obtaining permission, continued:

"You all know that in my early youth I lost all my kindred by the Indians. My father and brother were killed at the house, the body of my mother and infant sister were found two days out upon the trail, where they had been tomahawked; so, at least, we supposed, but the wolves had been there before us, and we could only identify them by the clothes.

"But while at Philadelphia, I met an old borderer, and chanced to do him a service, and we became quite friendly. He had led an eventful life, and as I afterward learned, was one of the prisoners taken at the massacre where I lost my all. He had managed to obtain ransom after several years.

"From him I learned that my mother was *not* killed upon the trail, but had lived to reach the village, where she died; that when he left, my sister was still living, having been adopted by the wife of a chief. Of the events since—whether she was yet alive or had died, he had no means of knowing; but that there was a young white girl with the section under

command of Sleepy Eye, who had grown up with them, as he believed, from a child.

"Her probable age corresponded with that of my sister, should she still live, and I felt in my heart that it was indeed her. I immediately started for home, after learning the name of the Indian agent stationed at that village. It was *Colonel David Nunan*.

"Now you see why I resolved to keep the appointment at the Cross-Oak, and if not detected, to pass myself off as Joseph Curd, the renegade traitor. I had sufficient *data* in the papers secured to enable me to do this.

"I did this, and sent a note, affixing date for an interview with Nunan. It was then that the Beaver discovered and fired at us. I had intended explaining all to you, and hastened here for that purpose, asking for Judge Grainger at the gate, but you were excited and would not allow me to explain.

"Had you searched, you would have found enough to clear me, but you did not; and the rest you know. I could not remain idle; my heart was on fire to see my sister, as I firmly believed her to be, and I believe I was half insane with mingled hope and fear. I escaped, as you know.

"I sought the village of the Shawnee chief, Sleepy Eye, deceived both him and Nunan, and obtained an interview with the White Fawn, as she whom I believed to be my sister was called.

"The Beaver was captured and sentenced to die at the stake. At the peril of my life I ventured to obtain his freedom, as he can certify.

"Then by close questioning I learned enough to convince me that I had in reality found my long-lost sister, and as the Beaver gave me notice of your contemplated attack, I fled, with her, and arrived here last night.

"In proof of this I hand you the papers I found upon Curd. Some of you know his handwriting, and can testify whether they be original or not," and as he concluded, Vilott produced a small packet of documents, handing them to Judge Grainger, who examined them closely before passing them on to the jury, together with the black pocket-book already alluded to.

"Friends," said the judge, arising and speaking earnestly,

"I must admit that we have deeply wronged the prisoner Mr. Vilott. I also had obtained proof of his innocence, and the black-hearted treachery of one who is now dead, and the papers he has just produced furnish the missing link. I can swear to the writing and signature as those of Joseph Curd, and freely add that, as far as I am concerned, I believe Mr. Vilott to be perfectly innocent of any wrong intention.

"Only in one thing was he to blame—in not confessing all at any cost, for then all this trouble and hard-feeling would have been avoided. But as a mere matter of form, I ask you, gentlemen of the jury, is the prisoner guilty or not guilty? You hold all the evidence in those papers."

"NOT GUILTY!" was the unanimous reply.

Well, we need say but little more, leaving all the minor items to the fancy of the reader.

Fletcher Vilott was made much of by those who had so lately been hunting him to the death, and those most bitter were now the men who heaped the most favors and kindnesses upon him, to partly atone for their mistake.

Annie was greatly petted and caressed both by male and female, and quickly found herself at home and among friends. And, as time wore on, her charms of mind and person took captive the heart of a sturdy young settler, who married her out of hand, and both passed many long and happy years—living to see their grandchildren grow up to man and womanhood.

Fletcher Vilott and Katie Grainger were married, and the two merriest persons at the wedding were Crazy Dicky and Ah-zah, the Beaver, who for once cast gravity to the winds, capering around like a school-boy upon a holiday.

Vilott never afterward heard of Ezra Duff, and it is supposed that he fell during the night attack. Seth Bender soon after died, and from that time Crazy Dicky became one of the family, living with the "pretty lady" and "nice gentleman" to the day of his death.

Of the remainder—Simon Kenton, Lewis Whetzel, etc., we need not speak. They are long since dead, but they still live—in the memories of their countrymen, and upon the pages of history.

THE END.

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